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# THE VALUE OF A PLACE: DEVELOPMENT POLITICS ON THE EAST CAPE OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

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THE VALUE OF A PLACE:  
DEVELOPMENT POLITICS ON THE EAST CAPE  
OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By

Ryan B. Anderson

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Sarah Lyon, Professor of Anthropology

Lexington, Kentucky

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### THE VALUE OF A PLACE: DEVELOPMENT POLITICS ON THE EAST CAPE OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

This research explores the politics of development on the East Cape of Baja California Sur, Mexico. Based upon twelve months of ethnographic research and participant observation, primarily in the coastal community of Cabo Pulmo, the researcher investigates and documents how local residents respond to the social and political implications of impending mass tourism development in the region. Rising land values, real estate speculation, and intensifying conflicts over land ownership were some of the earliest symptoms of this process. The central argument is that social conflicts over development are often based in deeper, fundamental political struggles over land—and the ability to participate in the development process itself. This represents an important contribution to our understanding of the political and social dynamics of development, which, in the literature, are often framed in abstract terms of debate that remain highly detached from the lived realities of the people who stand to lose the most if development goes awry. Using the concepts of value, development, community, and sustainability as theoretical starting points, this research argues that conflicts over development should be seen as struggles for inclusion and participation above all else. Ultimately, the conclusion of this research is that conflicts over ownership of and access to land continue to impede alternative forms of development that seek to avoid the negative social, political, and economic consequences of traditional mass tourism models.

KEYWORDS: value, sustainable development, community, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

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Ryan B. Anderson

Student's signature

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December 15, 2014

Date

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DEVELOPMENT POLITICS ON THE EAST CAPE  
OF BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to a future generation of students, professors, and activists who were finally able to rescue our system of higher education from itself and rekindle both its purpose and its power. In the absence of such a fortuitous future, as the saying goes, “The time is always now to do what is right.”

I also dedicate this dissertation to my friend Takami S. Delise.

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First I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Sarah Lyon, for her patience, guidance, and support throughout this entire doctoral process. When I first started writing this dissertation, I was living in Yucatan, Mexico, where my wife was undertaking her own ethnographic fieldwork. Our baby boy, Paulo, was only months away from being born. I was trying to write everyday, but there just wasn't much time. It was an incredibly stressful period and the writing I was doing at the time was not going to win me any awards. We were under assault, and we were losing. We were so busy and so stressed out it was hard to even think about writing a dissertation. I remember sending an email to Dr. Lyon in the middle of all this—it was an early draft of one of my chapters. It was mostly garbage, which is the lay of the land when it comes to first drafts. I was a bit worried about what my advisor was going to say. I told her I was working as much as I could and trying to stick to the timeline we agreed upon. Her email was short and sweet. It said something to the effect of “I am impressed that you’re getting anything done considering everything you two are going through.” She told me not to worry, to just do what I could. Writing a dissertation is one part insanity, one part madness, and one part “Sheer, brutal drudgery” (this last quote comes from the photographer Brett Weston). All I can say is that Dr. Lyon’s kindness and patience in those times of immense stress were vital—vital—in getting me to this point where, amazingly, this massive project is finally done. Thank you, Sarah. For everything.

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### Timeline of Events

1856 – Cruz Montaña receives grant for large parcel of land along present day East Cape.

1857 – Esteva mentions Cabo Pulmo as a valuable source of pearls.

1897 – Birth of Jesus Castro Fiol in either Cabo Pulmo or Miraflores.

1910-1920 – Approximate dates for when Meri Montaña owns a cattle ranch and pearling operation in Cabo Pulmo. According to interviews, both Jesus Castro Fiol and Chico Cañedo work for her around this time.

1920s – Peak of pearl fishing in Lower California.

1940s – End of pearling due to overexploitation and disease.

1950s – Shark fishing becomes primary economic activity in Cabo Pulmo.

1973 – Completion of the trans-peninsular highway in Baja.

1973-1975 – Dick Barrymore arrives in Cabo Pulmo. Purchases land from Gonzales Canseco family with help of friends and investors. Castro family disputes legitimacy of this sale.

1977 – International airport finished in San Jose del Cabo.

1980s – Cabo Pulmo begins of shift toward tourism economy because of degradation of Pulmo Reef; Dick Barrymore begins selling parcels of land in “Phase II” of Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort.

1993 – Creation of the “Law of Foreign Investment” helps pave the way for more foreign investment throughout Baja. Expat population surges in Cabo Pulmo.

1995 – Dedication of marine protected area that eventually becomes Cabo Pulmo National Park.

2003 – Creation of Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP).

2007-2008 – Announcement of Cabo Cortés and Cabo Riviera. As land values and disputes increase, more properties in Cabo Pulmo and the East Cape are fenced in.

2012 – President Felipe Calderon announces cancellation of Cabo Cortés on June 15 because of environmental concerns. A few months later a similar project is announced for the same location, under the name “Los Pericues.” This project is also shelved due to environmental issues.

2014 – Cabo Dorado project is announced by many of the same investors and boosters who were behind Cabo Cortés. This project is suspended, once again, because of environmental concerns. At the time of writing, the Mexican government is once again set to review this project.

## Prologue: Getting to the East Cape

The East Cape is an idea, a leftover, a holdout, a dream, another chance not to destroy every last refuge of the natural world. It's a blank slate and a paradise already in peril. It is a place that has been sidelined from history—despite more than 10,000 years of human occupation. It is “undeveloped” and it is being stripped apart and commoditized, piece by piece. It is wide open, and far more conflicted and closed than most visitors imagine. It's a delusion, a fantasy, an overly romantic ideal in the dreams of conservationists, scientists, environmentalists, and naïve young anthropologists. It's already destroyed. It has been depleted, polluted, violated. But it's also been a place of recovery, rebirth, and changed minds.

It is a place of open spaces, wide views, long beaches, and deep blue, reef-laden bays. It is a place of private property, no-trespassing signs, land disputes, lies, barb wire fences, and violence. It is “off the grid” and it is chained to gasoline power and electric generators. It is free from the crowds and over-development of cities, yet anything but free from fear, hatred, and social segregation. Year by year, it is increasingly divided up, sold, privatized. It's what “Old Mexico” used to be like. It is doomed. It has to be saved. It can't be saved. It is an alluring place, like many before it. It is an investment, a home, a place for escape, work, leisure, and prejudice. It is all of these things at once, depending on where you go, who you meet, and when you arrive—and where you're coming from.

The East Cape is more than one place. It is many. It is more than one idea, or ideal. It is many ideas and ideals. It is not just one dream, but many. It is not a source of pain—or inspiration—for one person, but many. This is one account of the East Cape. My version, my account. One more among many. It's a story about an escape from over-development. An escape from the freeways and crowds and “we did everything wrong” narratives about places like Los Angeles, Las Vegas or even Cancún. It's a story about economic survival in the face of change. It's a story about community—and the idea of home. It's a story about the meaning of development.

Do you ever wonder what that really means? Development? I have heard it all my life but I still don't know what to make of it. It sounds like something gray and dull, something that creeps along no matter what you do. Like some disease. Or hope. It is

renewal and destruction at the same time. It's a reality, like the sun coming up. Maybe it just happens. Development means paperwork, for sale signs, bulldozers, and inevitability. It's something born of board rooms and meetings and plans and politics and payoffs and greed for money. But it's also optimism, pragmatism, and hope for a better future. People develop the world around them, right? That's what they do. It's just the nature of things. Don't fight it and don't think about it. It can't be helped. Development is a machine. It's a way of thinking about the world.

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The first time I ever saw the East Cape was in 2005. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew what I wanted to see. What I remember most about the East Cape were the long dirt roads, the small houses and little *tiendas*, the expansive coastlines, and the feeling of open space. I knew the deserts of California and the Southwest—that's where I grew up—but I wasn't quite ready for what I encountered down at the tip of the Baja Peninsula. It was as if someone had taken the deserts of Arizona or Utah or Eastern California and placed them right on the ocean. I was hooked.

We flew down from Los Angeles on a quick Alaska Air flight that only took two hours. But the transition from the madness of LAX to the isolation and starkness of the East Cape was riveting. The endless flickering lights and jammed freeways of Los Angeles could not contrast sharper with the darkness and lonely, bumpy dirt roads of the East Cape. In Los Angeles you can't escape the lights of civilization. In Cabo Pulmo you can't escape the lights of billions of night stars. One of my strongest memories from that first trip was actually our return—we left the open, off-the-grid life of the East Cape only to be bombarded by the traffic, blaring horns, police, and chaos of LAX. I have a very vivid memory of a police officer yelling at us to keep moving while we were trying to wait for our ride to pull over and pick us up. "Welcome back to hell," I said to my friend. He laughed, but we both knew it wasn't too far from the truth.

I come from Southern California, a place where development seems like some inevitable, endless juggernaut that will never be stopped. It seems irreversible, as if there's no other way forward except more freeways, massive houses, and strip malls. It's a place where Carl Karcher's dream for the USA seems to be coming true (see Schlosser 2001). A place of uniform landscapes and gentrified public spaces, where we give up on



the discomforts of nature (and democratic participation) so we can have fast food, complacency, and comfort. Open spaces become Wal-Marts. Public places become pay-for-parking lots. That's just the order of things where I come from—a place where “green spaces” and “nature” are golf courses and little strange strips of private grass in business parks.

I lived in Orange County until I was 10. Suburbia. The land of Richard Nixon, horses, orange groves, and money. When I was a kid, I ran around on a little cul-de-sac playing army or pretending I was Indiana Jones while “progress” marched on all around me. Orange County was a place that actually used to be filled with these things called orange trees. But all of the groves were cleared away to make room for more and more development and the droves of people who wanted to be part of the California lifestyle. That's what I remember. More houses and people. Less space. Some call this progress. And maybe it is—but at what cost? That's where I come from: a place where the “growth machine” (Logan and Molotch 1987; see also Davis 1990) reigns above all. When I was 11 years old we moved down to San Diego County, and while it was definitely not as over-developed as Los Angeles and Orange County, it was not immune from the pressures of growth. Everything, even laid back San Diego, seems to grow. Endlessly.

Maybe that's why I have always been drawn to deserts and open spaces. I found myself gravitating to places like Joshua Tree National Park and Death Valley and Arches National Park. In my late teens and early 20s I suddenly wanted to escape to any place that wasn't overrun with buildings, parking lots, smog, and the subtle asphyxiation that is suburban life. I'm not really sure, though, where this desire to find openness and space came from. I didn't exactly have a rural upbringing. I was undeniably a product of suburbia. I didn't go camping much when I was little, and I certainly did not have an outdoorsy sort of upbringing. I didn't grow up going hiking or spending a lot of time in “nature” or any of that. Maybe it was surfing that did it, which I started when I was eleven years old. When you're out in the ocean there is something relaxing about being away from things, and being able to stare out into a distant horizon that's not full of street lights and road signs and rules and regulations. Deserts gave me a similar sense of openness and space and freedom.

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I never intended to make Cabo Pulmo into a research site. The first time I traveled there was in 2005. I went with a small group of friends from Southern California. One of them owned a small piece of land in this place called “Cabo Pulmo” and asked if I wanted to go check it out. I jumped at the chance, but wasn’t sure what to expect. I’d grown up in San Diego County and spent a lot of time surfing in the northern part of the peninsula, so it was my first time seeing anything beyond Guerrero Negro.

During that time, I was working as a Cultural Resource Management archaeologist in San Diego County. Basically, when anyone needs to build something (a road, housing development, etc), they have to call in professional biologists, geomorphologists, hydrologists, geologists, and archaeologists (among others) in order to satisfy environmental, cultural, and other regulations. Back in 2005, we were on a project in my home town of Carlsbad, California. The development was a golf course project, located up on a hill overlooking the well-known theme park “Legoland” (which, by the way, was built on its own fair share of archaeological sites). We were called in to do the archaeological work and move things along. The site itself had a prehistoric component that dated to about 5000 years ago, and a more recent component that dated to the historic/contact period. It was destined to be “capped”—or buried—underneath the golf course. Our job, as the archaeologists, was to document and sample the site before it was covered up.

At the time, I saw all of this development as another step in a larger process that was pricing me out of the place I thought of as home. I was not alone. I was pretty young when I realized that I wasn’t going to be able to afford to actually own a piece of land in Carlsbad. While it was relatively affordable when my family first arrived in the mid-1980s, by the late '90s real estate was so expensive that I settled into a sort of despaired resignation about the whole idea of home. The new golf course, which I was indirectly helping to create, wasn’t created for me. It was for all the people who could actually afford \$500,000 and million dollar homes in what used to be a junky little beach town. Maybe that’s the price of progress.

Working in CRM put me on the front lines of “development,” and it wasn’t always easy to watch, let alone participate in the process. Development seemed not only inevitable, but also unjust, since it so often resulted in the erasure of the histories of

places and people. Not only that, but it took unique, open spaces and turn them into homogenous landscapes. Every place, it seemed, was destined to be scrubbed of its history and turned into another shopping mall, housing development, or Starbucks—and my job as a CRM archaeologist was to help push the process forward by “mitigating” the archaeological and cultural factors. That’s what we did, in essence: we took care of the cultural resources part of the equation to satisfy the bureaucratic requirements of the environmental impact process. We documented, analyzed—and removed—the histories of places in a timely, professional manner. I found the work fascinating on many levels. But I also found it depressing. What does any of this have to do with Baja California and the East Cape? Well, escaping to Baja—a place that seemed to hold out against development for so long—sounded better and better.

Baja was exactly what I’d imagined and hoped for. So naturally I loved it. This is a common occurrence in tourism: if a place conforms to our expectations, we tend to be content (Bruner 2004). If it doesn’t, we might be disappointed. I was anything but disappointed during that first trip. We surfed, went diving in the blue waters, camped on the beach, ate fish tacos, and had a great time. It was all so good that I drove back down the next chance I could, which was in October of 2006. Pulmo and the East Cape seemed to be much of the same: open, beautiful, undeveloped. It did seem idyllic. Or, that’s what I allowed it to be. But I wasn’t looking very closely. I had already spent the better part of my year looking closely at some bitter development politics in my own back yard, and if the East Cape seemed like an ideal place, I was ready and willing to accept it as such. For the time being.

But 2006 was also the year that the CRM company I worked for got the contract for a massive power line project that was to stretch from Del Mar (on the coast) all the way to the Salton Sea. It was a tremendous project, especially for a company with only six employees. Still, we took it on. The archaeology and history of the project area was amazing, extensive, and daunting. The proposed project area started off at coastal midden sites, traversed its way across the mountains, and then out into the blistering heat of the Anza-Borrego and Imperial deserts. It was impressive.

However, as with many things in life, it was a bit of a love-hate relationship I had with that project. The archaeology was fantastic: this project cut a swath across San

Diego and Imperial Counties that gave us an incredible sample of local prehistory. The sites spanned from coastal habitation and tool production sites, across the mountains, and down into the desert, where we came across rock rings, cleared circles, and other fascinating remnants of San Diego's past. That was the good part of the project.

Then there was the "hate" part. The project itself was incredibly contentious and political. There was fierce opposition to the power line project, ranging from environmentalists who were fighting to protect the Anza-Borrego State Park to local communities who didn't want the power line running through their back yard. The power company had to come up with all kinds of possible routes for the line because of all the political, economic, and environmental obstacles. We surveyed all of those routes, and we did many of them in the dead of summer. We were also some of the first envoys of "development," and people were (rightfully so) often not happy to see us. Some members of our crew were even greeted by angry locals with guns.

When I arrived in Baja that October of 2006, I once again saw what I wanted to see. I wanted to see something that was different from home, different from the seemingly endless expansion of housing. I went to Baja and I found my escape. A paradise.

Or so it seemed.

When I returned to the East Cape in October 2008, things were different. The change down on the East Cape was unmistakable. The landscape was covered with fences, signs, guards and guard towers—up and down the East Cape. Evidence of conflict was everywhere, not just the landscape, but in some of the rumors floating around about what was going on. Fences seemed to be everywhere, mocking the idea of an open, passable, free place. Where did they come from? Who put them there? The landscape cut up into little fragments, making it possible to fight over them through a range of legal—and not so legal—processes.

I wanted to know more about what was happening—and why. The development that I saw in Baja—and all of the conflicts that came with it—looked suspiciously similar to what I saw back home. As if there was some kind of connection or pattern to it all. I wanted to explore those connections and patterns. I was especially interested in the role of the expats and Americans and Canadians in all of this, since, at least in some ways,

many of them were basically “my people.” And by that I mean that many of the people who found their way to the East Cape were actually from southern California, like me. They are surfers, divers, fishermen who came down the Baja seeking escape. Yet, they were also recreating certain patterns, certain ways of making places, of developing that had broader, more powerful roots. This was the beginning of many questions I started asking about Baja California Sur, Mexico, the East Cape, and development. It was also the beginning of my PhD research.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*These changes are for the “good” of Baja California. Towns and cities are growing and the general economy has improved greatly. The advances and advantages, however, are not without cost. Much of that cost is the loss, already, of some of the peninsula’s natural values. It is essential that these values be recognized, protected and cherished, if they are to survive. Their protection is an obligation of the present, an obligation to the future.*

-George E. Lindsay, “Some Natural Values of Baja California,” 1970.

### **No trespassing in paradise**

Summer 2009. My wife and I are driving north on a bumpy dirt road on our way out of the small coastal community of Cabo Pulmo. We pass through the neighboring community of Las Barracas. Signs along the road blare out “No trespassing!” and “Keep out!” Barbed wire fences run along the whole length of the road. Just past the community of Las Barracas, we see something in the road. It’s a car. Smoldering. We pull up alongside, fearing the worst. But there’s nobody inside. Just the charred, still smoking remnants of a small car. The tires melted. Smoke streaming up from the innards. Nearby is one of many places where private security guards have made camp. We drive on. Eventually, we find out that the burned car was another casualty of the land disputes that were engulfing many parts of the East Cape of Baja California Sur, Mexico (see Figure 1.1).

While land disputes have been ongoing for years in the region, the whole situation took a severe turn for the worse in 2007-2008 when two large tourism development projects were authorized for the East Cape. One was called “Cabo Cortés,” the other “Cabo Riviera.” Planned for the Punta Arena region, the plans for Cabo Cortés called for more than 30,000 rooms, a marina, multiple golf courses, residential development, and hotels. If completed, it would create a tourism zone that rivals the size of present day Los Cabos. Cabo Riviera was a scaled-down version of Cabo Cortés, with about one-fifth the rooms as well as a marina, residential development, hotels, and a golf course. Both projects promised big changes for the East Cape, and they also sparked a speculation frenzy that resulted in skyrocketing land values. Those rising values, in turn, fueled and intensified local disputes over who actually owned the land. Suddenly, it seemed,

everyone wanted to cash in on the big money promises of tourism (and residential) development.

But not everyone. While many residents of the East Cape supported the idea of bringing large-scale tourism development to the region, others stood vigorously and steadfastly in opposition. Residents of Cabo Pulmo, in collaboration with a coalition of national and international NGOs and community groups, led the charge. The “Cabo Pulmo Vivo” campaign, which began in 2010, focused on stopping Cabo Cortés in the name of saving Pulmo Reef and keeping the East Cape from turning into another Cancún or Cabo San Lucas. Over the next several years, Cabo Cortés became the symbolic face of the problems, depredations, and unwanted after-effects that come with large-scale tourism development. But for those in favor of development, it also became a symbol of jobs and economic development in a marginalized, out-of-the-way place (Tsing 2005) where “job opportunities” are extremely limited. Cabo Cortés was the proverbial lightning rod, and the future of the East Cape hung in the balance.



Figure 1.1: Location of Baja California Sur, Mexico

Global tourism development has pulled many relatively remote regions around the world into an increasingly connected—and growing—market. Baja California Sur, the southern state of one of Mexico’s most historically marginalized territories, is a perfect example (see Gámez and Ganster 2012:249). Over the course of the last three decades,

Baja California Sur (BCS) has emerged as one of Mexico's most successful and dynamic tourism destinations. The development of the Los Cabos tourism zone since the 1980s has been a fundamental part of this transformation from marginalization to international renown. Tourism development in Los Cabos has been so successful—at least from some perspectives—that it serves as a model for other development projects throughout the state (Gómez and Ganster 2012: 253). The East Cape of BCS, located about two hours away from Los Cabos by car, is one of the newest potential targets for mass tourism development. But over the course of the past several years, the small community of Cabo Pulmo, in conjunction with a coalition of national and international NGOs, has been fighting against the encroachment of these *megadesarrollos*, while advocating an alternative, “sustainable” future.

My overall argument is that this optimistic advocacy for an alternative future (see Gómez and Ganster 2012) is threatened by several intertwined processes and problems. These include the continued commoditization of place, the continued effects of a community long-fractured by land disputes, and, finally, the problems, contradictions, and complications that arise when a community places its faith in an unwieldy concept such as “sustainable development”. In the midst of these processes lie the stories, memories, and histories of the people who live through the development process itself. The meaning of development is a matter of perspective, interests, experience, and politics.

### **Tourism and development in Mexico**

Like many developing countries, Mexico has made a strong push toward tourism development as a primary strategy for economic advancement (Clancy 2001; Berger and Wood 2010). This effort truly took shape in the late 1960s, spurred in part by the successes of tourism development in the Caribbean and a desire on the part of the Mexican government to get in on the action (see Clancy 2001; Berger and Wood 2010; Saragoza 2010).

Mexico first began its quest to capture the tourism market at the onset of the 1930s. This came about, in part, because the long-held tensions with its northern neighbor had finally eased. Both Canada and Cuba enjoyed the fruits of American leisure



spending, and “Mexico intended to enter the race for the tourist dollar” (Berger 2006: 11). In a 1929 press conference, Mexican President Portes Gil began to lay the foundations for this new economic goal (Berger 2006: 11). What followed were a series of measures that were intended to make travel to Mexico easier and “safer.” This included an effort to improve Mexico’s infrastructure, as well as the creation of Mexico’s first official tourism organization, the Mixed Pro-Tourism Commission (CMPT) (Berger 2006:12). However, due to the Great Depression Mexico’s tourism project saw little success or growth between 1929 and 1935 (Berger 2006:12).

At the time, Mexico had a perception problem. This was a serious hurdle to overcome for any country that sought to attract more visitors. As Edward Bruner writes, “the success of the tourism industry depends on stable government and guarantees to personal safety” (Bruner 2005:58). In other words, tourists tend to shy away from politically unstable regions. Mexico had a history of tumultuous relations with the United States, and had just gone through a bloody revolution (1910-1929). It still had a reputation as an unstable place in the early 1930s—especially for many Americans. Tourism’s success hinged on how Americans perceived Mexico: “Even the slightest suspicion or malicious rumor spread in the U.S. press about the possibility of revolution or rebellion during presidential elections affected tourist rates almost immediately” (Berger 2006: 13). One factor that did help Mexico was the fact that tourism in Europe was seriously reduced during the 1920s and 1930s, due to the devastation from World War I and the rise of fascism and National Socialism (Berger 2006: 13). During this period, American tourists shifted toward travel within the Americas, and Mexico became a new and appealing destination. From 1929 to 1946, tourism arrivals in Mexico steadily increased.

The administrations of Presidents Miguel Alemán and Adolfo Ruiz promoted tourism along the U.S. border between 1945 and 1958 in order to increase revenue and finance the modernization project in Mexico (López et al. 2006: 361). Alemán’s presidency focused on Mexico’s infrastructure, investing in power, water, and systems of transportation (Meyer et al. 2003: 614-616). This included the completion of Mexico’s portion of the Pan-American Highway, which was crucial not only for spurring production in the national economy and providing the necessary transportation capacities

in a growing tourism economy. Alemán also backed the creation of a massive four-lane highway between Mexico City and Acapulco, a city that would soon become “a playground for the world’s rich” (Meyer et al. 2003: 616). Between 1946 and 1952, paved roads in Mexico increased from about 2,500 miles to more than 10,000 (Meyer et al. 2003: 616).

Acapulco soon became Mexico’s first internationally successful coastal tourism destination. When Miguel Alemán took the office of the presidency in 1946, he used his executive powers to quicken Acapulco’s rise to prominence (Saragoza 2010:298). Acapulco completely changed the face of tourism in Mexico, which had previously focused on monumental architecture—cathedrals and pyramids—mostly in Mexico City. After he left office, Alemán continued to influence Mexico’s tourism policies for several years (Saragoza 2010:298). He also found ways to direct state resources toward his own tourism-related business interests.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, “the Mexican State planned and prepared new areas of coastal regions for mass tourism while still promoting traditional coastal resorts such as Acapulco and Puerto Vallarta” (López et al. 2006: 361). Up until 1956, foreign interests controlled the majority of the hotel industry; this led to the creation of the Fondo de Garantía y Fomento al Turismo (Tourism Guarantee and Promotion Fund or FOGATUR), which assisted Mexican investors in competing with foreign capital (Bringas-Rábago 2002: 275). FOGATUR was the first federal institution that directed funds and resources into tourism development (Clancy 2001: 45). In 1961 the National Tourism Council, which was headed by former president Alemán, was established. This was followed by the creation of the first National Tourist Plan, which was completed by 1962 (Clancy 2001: 46). Tourism support wavered somewhat in the 1960s, however, since both Presidents Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) were decidedly cool on the issue (Clancy 2001: 45-46). Overall, the Mexican State’s investment in tourism, while slowly on the rise, was still relatively small up until the end of the 1960s.

By the mid-1960s, global tourism was a powerful, growing force (Clancy 2001: 47). The rise of mass transportation allowed for increased tourism and travel in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, the central bank of Mexico created plans that called for a dramatic

expansion of tourism development in order to spur job growth and export revenues (Clancy 2001: 49). A team of bankers, lawyers, architects, and urban planners drafted the plans, which were founded upon a belief in the importance of rational, scientific reasoning (Clancy 2001: 49). The study called for the creation and development of five planned tourism facilities, or “poles” at Cancún (in the state of Quintana Roo), Ixtapa (Guerrero), Los Cabos and Loreto (Baja California Sur), and finally Huatulco (Oaxaca) (Clancy 2001:50). Importantly, all of these sites were located on the coast, and were planned and directed by government officials (Clancy 2001:50).<sup>1</sup> In this way the Mexican government became the prominent force that shaped the image of the nation for future tourists.

In 1969 the National Trust Fund for Tourist Infrastructure (INFRATUR) was created. It was administered by the central bank (Clancy 2001:51), and was the main agency responsible for development of the five tourism regions. INFRATUR was also charged with overseeing the modernization of already existent tourism facilities, as well as encouraging private (and often foreign) investment (Clancy 2001:51). INFRATUR also had the ability to expropriate land for development. Clancy highlights the fact that INFRATUR originated from within the central bank, which “was among the most orthodox institutions in the Mexican government” (2001:51).

The central bank and the staff of INFRATUR consisted of liberal economists, many educated in the United States (Clancy 2001:52). Large-scale tourism development in Mexico began with a foundation of economic rationalism, state-led planning, and top-down models. The development plan of the five “poles” aimed to capture a mass market of middle class and foreign tourists (Clancy 2001:52). Foreign capital investment (including loans from the World Bank) became critical elements of Mexico’s national tourism development plan.

Cancún was specifically selected to draw American tourists into the Mexican Caribbean. As Clancy explains, when the head of INFRATUR was asked what motivated the development of the Cancún site, he answered, “Money. Tourists mean money” (2001:53). Cancún was also chosen, however, for political reasons (Clancy 2001:53;

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<sup>1</sup> All of these destinations were small, coastal settlements when they were chosen as sites for tourism development. This pattern continues to inform Mexican tourism development today—Cabo Cortés is one of the latest examples.

Wilson 2008:38). The Mexican State hoped that tourism development would be able to bring the historically volatile region of Quintana Roo (Dumond 1997; Reed 1964) more into the fold of the nation state. The hope was that tourism would help to bring social stability to the economically and politically marginalized region. The same philosophy inspired the development of Loreto and Los Cabos in Baja California Sur (Wilson 2008:38).

In the case of Cancún, INFRATUR was a powerful force, in part because of the low population numbers of the region. The agency was the primary governing power throughout the area (Clancy 2001:54). After expropriating land from around 170 people who lived in the area, INFRATUR manufactured an entire new city. This pattern of expulsion and expropriation by the federal government also occurred in Ixtapa, Zihuatanejo, and Huatulco. In Cancún, state officials also built a separate city for employees who serviced the tourism industry. This reflected another consistent trend in tourism development: the separation of the workers from the “leisure space of the tourists” (Clancy 2001:55).

When Luis Echeverría took over the presidency in 1970, he attempted to distance himself from Alemán’s legacy while also trying to promote tourism as an economic development strategy. Echeverría’s administration was responsible for changes that resulted in the formation of FONATUR in 1974 (Saragoza 2010:298). FOGATUR and INFRATUR merged in 1974, creating FONATUR (the National Fund for Tourism Development). FONATUR became the primary agency that oversaw development of the planned resorts, “as well as the chief financier for other tourism projects” (Clancy 2001:56). FONATUR’s first big achievement was the creation of Cancún, which crystallized Mexico’s new emphasis on the sun, sea, and sand tourism model, while also directly challenging, and eventually conquering, the reign of Alemán’s Acapulco as Mexico’s top international tourism destination.

In 1974, the Department of Tourism was raised to the cabinet level ministry position of Secretaría (SECTUR) (Clancy 2001:56). This resulted in greater political prestige and access to resources for the newly ascribed SECTUR. Despite the fact that FONATUR was technically under the administration of SECTUR, the former assumed more political and economic clout, including the power to buy and expropriate land.

These powers also included the ability to resettle local populations when necessary (Clancy 2001: 56). FONATUR operated, as the years passed, as a more and more autonomous agency, and was for the most part self-sufficient. Part of this autonomy was maintained through connections with both the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Clancy 2001:56).

Also in the 1970s, large multinational tourism corporations managed to infiltrate the Mexican tourism market. The Mexican government was not resistant to the foreign capital investments, and even sought further means to attract increased interest in Mexico's potential. The Mexican government, however, faced a serious legal problem, since Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution prohibited foreigners from owning coastal property (Lopez et al. 2006:361). This legal issue was sidestepped in 1974 with the creation of 'tourist trusteeships,' which provided federal protection for foreign capital in the form of "legal concessions that are given to foreigners enabling them to own land in zones prohibited by the Mexican Constitution for a period of 50 years, with the possibility of renewal for another 50 years" (Lopez et al. 2006:362). FONATUR was, and still is, in charge of promoting and selling these trusteeships throughout the five development poles. While foreign companies exploited this opportunity and quickly began investing throughout Mexico, many sectors of Mexican society were strongly opposed, since funds went to coastal tourism development instead of local economic development (Lopez et al. 2006:362).

Mexican government planners argued that tourism development at these regionally marginalized poles would foster economic development, create jobs, and reduce inequality (Lopez et al. 2006:362). In fact, this has not been the case, as many investigations illustrate (Lopez 2006:362; Clancy 2001; Brenner and Aguilar 2002; Castaneda 1996; Wilson 2008). Economic inequality and high social stratification run rampant throughout Mexico's tourism zones, especially in the case of coastal tourism sites such as Cancún, San Jose del Cabo, and Cabo San Lucas. "Tourism," Tamar Diana Wilson argues, "as part of the current capitalist order, does not cause these inequalities of wealth but is shaped by and reinforces trends present in global capitalism" (2008:48).

This history of tourism development and policy in Mexico can be read as one long process through which various geographic places throughout the country were

dramatically altered through integration into the global market. Despite the government rhetoric about economic development in the interests of its citizenry, the push for tourism was about revenue, capital, and money for wealthy investors. It was a political process through which the well-being of communities (and places) to a back seat to the drive to capture a growing market. For nearly three decades, Cancún was the preeminent destination in Mexico, the jewel of its tourism economy. It was the place that captured that demand and received international renown for doing so. It was also the place where local people were dispossessed in the name of progress, economic development, and national indices. But Cancún's days of glory are long gone. It is no longer Mexico's top tourism resort city. As Butler pointed out long ago, every destination has a life cycle that eventually comes to an end. By the end of the 1990s, Cancún had clearly passed its prime (Saragoza 2012:308). Los Cabos, which was built to attract a completely different class of tourists, soon took its place. And so the process continued.

### **Los Cabos**

In the 1970s, the area now known as "Los Cabos" (the capes, literally) was little more than a small seaside fishing community. Until the 1980s, the entire BCS peninsula remained relatively disconnected, uninhabited, and marginalized from the global economy (Gámez and Ganster 2012:254). All of that changed with the massive tourism investment that began in the late 1970s, including the completion of the trans-peninsular highway in 1973 and the construction of the international airport in 1977.

Between 1950 and 1974, a cadre of mostly American hoteliers established six hotels in the present day Los Cabos region, despite the fact that foreigners were not legally allowed to own coastal land (Lopez et al. 2006:369). These hoteliers found a way around this roadblock by cooperating with Mexican citizens who were willing to play the role of "front men" (Lopez et al. 2006:369), also known as *prestanombres*. The creation of the trusteeships in the 1970s made such deals unnecessary in later years. The 1970s were, however, filled with cases in which land was either expropriated and sold legally, or illegally appropriated outright. The trusteeship, along with government cooperation, greatly encouraged foreign capital investment and by the year 2000 more than thirty high-end hotels were established.

During the liberalization of the Mexican economy in the 1980s, the development of Los Cabos increased even more. As Gámez and Ganster (2012:255) explain, legal and institutional “stimuli” were created that provided “profuse” resources to the private sector “in order to develop tourism destinations anchored on (mostly) foreign investment.” Over the next decade and a half, Los Cabos grew into one of Mexico's most dynamic tourism destinations (Gámez and Ganster 2012:255).

The floodgate for foreign investment and control of the Los Cabos region was wide open. And the process was further assisted in 1994 after NAFTA was signed. Mexican law was once again modified to appeal to development agendas:

In December of 1993, in accordance with the final approval of the Free Trade Agreement, the investment regulations were liberated still further and were integrated into the Law of Foreign Investment. This new law facilitates possibilities for foreign investors to play a more active role in the Mexican economy, since it permits the unregulated flow of foreign investment in activities that add up to almost 80 percent of the Mexican economy. Specifically, in relation to the tourism, foreign investors may possess real estate in coastal and border areas of Mexico that were previously prohibited to them (FONATUR 1996: 10-11 in Lopez et al. 2006:370).

Tourism reached unprecedented levels in BCS because of the rapid growth of Los Cabos, which replaced La Paz as the state’s top tourism destination. Due to the increase of tourism development, Los Cabos had some of the highest rates of demographic expansion in all of Mexico. In 1980, the population of Los Cabos was 11,481, and by 2000 it jumped to 89,895 (Lopez et al. 2006:365). By 2005 it increased to 164,162 (INEGI 2005). As of 2010, the population soared to 238,352 (INEGI 2011 in Gámez 2012:214). This growth has taken place in approximately 180 square kilometers of territory.<sup>2</sup> Between 1995 and 2000, Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo had the fourth and seventh highest biannual growth rates of any Mexican city with a population over 15,000 (Lopez et al. 2006:366).

This rapid growth illustrates the appeal and effectiveness of the new tourism model that Los Cabos embraces and promotes. Rather than the youthful, beachside party-oriented tourism of Cancún, Los Cabos is all about affluence, exclusivity, and high end resorts. It is also known for drawing streams of Hollywood celebrities and other elite

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<sup>2</sup> The size of the entire *municipio* of Los Cabos is 3,451.51 square kilometers (CDI 2000); See <http://www.cdi.gob.mx/cedulas/2000/BCS/03008-00.pdf>

travelers. Cancún used to attract higher end clientele, but lost its edge in the market as the new millennium approached. Mexican policymakers wanted to find new ways to attract those wealthier tourists. The development of new, higher end resorts in the “Maya Riviera” south of Cancún was a beginning step in this new phase. But Mexican policymakers also sought completely new places where they could create destinations that would cater to wealthier guests. Los Cabos, located on the opposite side of the country from Cancún, provided the perfect locale for starting this renewed effort.

The archetypical tourist of Los Cabos was an older, wealthier, more than likely retired male from the US. The per capita income of tourists in Los Cabos has been estimated at \$77,000 per year, while daily expenses are approximately \$250-450 USD. This is nearly twice as high as destinations in the rest of Mexico (Gámez and Ganster 2012:259). Saragoza vividly captures the new, exclusive character of Los Cabos:

In contrast to the established reputation of Cancún, the prevailing image of Los Cabos is much more likely to be a middle-aged or older male, lining up for a putt on an immaculately manicured green bounded on one side by scrubby hills and cactus, and on the other, by the dark waters of the Sea of Cortez. Implicit in this picture is the golfer’s partner lounging poolside or having a treatment at the hotel spa, as young children are very unlikely to be around. And there is scant chance to encounter a bevy of loud teenagers in the hotel’s lobby, waiting for a cab to take them to a dance club for a night out. To the contrary, the imaging of Los Cabos is luxuriously sedate, sophisticated, and insulated, more reminiscent of a wealthy gated community or enclave than a beachside vacation getaway. [Saragoza 2010:309].

Los Cabos isn’t just about wealth and affluence—it’s also about safety and security. It is a place where security guards, gates, and walls surround guests. This obsession with safety and security is reflected in the pages of *Los Cabos Magazine*, a glossy, free publication that targets the US tourism market. One of the regular features of the magazine is a monthly report about the security situation in the Los Cabos region. These articles regularly highlight Mexican officials who tell the readership just how safe they are when in this part of Mexico. In the winter edition of 2011, BCS’s then Secretary of Tourism Jacobo Turque tells readers, “The municipality of Los Cabos—1,000 miles away from the US border—boasts a unique geographic location at the tip of the Baja Peninsula. Separated from mainland Mexico by the Sea of Cortés, it is an islandlike sanctuary, unaffected by any crime or violence occurring elsewhere in Mexico.” This concern for protection and security extends all the way to the sand, where “bright plastic



markers on the beachfronts keep unauthorized visitors from entering the spatial moat surrounding the resorts” (Saragoza 2010:309). The whole tourism complex in Los Cabos works hard to insulate its guests from the threats—real or imagined—of the outside world. This is just the latest phase in a long-running campaign to make Mexico “safe” for US travelers.

Social and spatial segregation may be a direct result of this incessant drive for safety and security. Los Cabos is a deeply divided social space (see Lopez et al. 2006). It is reminiscent of tourism development trends around the world in which locals are rigidly separated from incoming tourists (see Gregory 2007; Torres and Momsen 2005). The socially segregated landscape is also eerily similar to the “fortified enclaves” and gated communities described by Low (2001, 2005), Caldeira (1996, 2000), Davis (2006), and others. Poor, urban *colonias* or *cordones de miseria*, as they are often called, exist right alongside some of the most luxurious resorts in the world (Gámez and Ganster 2012:263). This segregated landscape is perpetuated architecturally by the walls and gates, and it’s also reinforced through informal social practices. Wilson powerfully captures this segregated reality:

In Los Cabos, squatter settlements along the trans-peninsular highway in [Los Cabos] are out of sight and far removed from tourist accommodations and restaurants, recreational facilities, and beaches. In these hidden residential *colonias* live the janitorial and maintenance staff and the chambermaids for the many tourist hotels, the waiters in the tourist restaurants, and the gardeners and domestic servants who work for the more affluent expatriates and the local elite. The beaches in front of most hotels are off-limits to working-class Mexicans; hotel security guards will approach them if they attempt to visit, asking whether or not they are lodged in the hotel, though this question is not asked of expatriates or tourists lodged in other hotels or condominiums [2008:47].

The affluent, exclusive, segregated, and security-obsessed nature of Los Cabos is just part of the story, however. Los Cabos is also different from many other tourism destinations in Mexico because the *place itself* isn’t the main draw. For decades, Mexican tourism policy focused on promoting the uniqueness of specific places, of being “in Mexico” as Saragoza puts it (2010:310). For decades, tourism in Mexico meant going to Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, or Cancún. It was about enjoying the histories, cultures, resources, and features of actual places. Rather than focusing on being in Mexico, tourism in Los Cabos was more about experiencing and consuming luxurious

amenities. As Saragoza argues, tourism in Los Cabos is based upon a kind of “placeless” aesthetic in which tourists flock to Mexico but the closed, secure, high end hotels do all they can to shield them from actually feeling like they’re in Mexico. Los Cabos is a place where Americans can quickly fly to Mexico, jump in a fast taxi, speed past the not-so-appealing squatter settlements and *colonias*, and be safely in their secure resort in almost no time at all. It’s a place where people can go to Mexico but feel like they aren’t too far from San Diego, Scottsdale, or Denver.

This new model of tourism is a resounding success on many levels. As Gámez and Ganster put it, Los Cabos has had an “enormous economic impact” in BCS (2012:258), not to mention Mexico’s tourism economy on the whole. The tourism sector in BCS accounts for about one-quarter of all businesses, nearly a third of all employment, about one-fifth of wages and salaries, and more than one-third of value-added in BCS (Gámez and Ganster 2012:255). It is Mexico’s second most important cruise ship destination. It also draws a tremendous number of tourists. In 1976, the number of tourists who arrived in BCS was 274,456. Eighteen percent went to Los Cabos. By 2007, the total number of visitors jumped to 1.5 million and approximately 73% of them went to Los Cabos. Los Cabos also completely dominates the foreign tourist market in BCS. In 2008, 91% of all foreign tourists stayed in the Los Cabos tourism zone (see Gámez and Ganster 2012:255-256). Los Cabos is an economic and political success that has undeniably captured the US market. But this success has come with many social, economic, and environmental costs.

Several researchers have documented the downside of “success” in Los Cabos (e.g. Gámez and Ganster 2012; Lopez et al. 2006; Wilson 2008). The creation of Los Cabos resulted in a vast “deconstruction” of the natural landscape and the creation of a massive new urban infrastructure (Gámez and Ganster 2012:261). The high demographic and economic growth of the region has also been characterized by a severe lack of public services and public space, “chaotic” urbanization, water shortages, real estate speculation, and environmental degradation (Gámez and Ganster 2012:261-263). Water access is one of the most pressing concerns throughout BCS, and Los Cabos is no exception. The situation is made all the more worse because of inequality of access to this resource. As of 2006, fifteen percent of the Mexican population of Los Cabos did not have potable

water in their homes (Lopez et al. 2006). Meanwhile, water streams from the faucets of the high end resorts as if this problem didn't exist.

The lack of water is just one example of the shortage and/or inequality of access when it comes to vital public services and resources. The Los Cabos tourism zone is also problematic, however, in terms of the diminishing quality of life of many of its residents. This rise of Los Cabos has brought more drugs, crime, and prostitution to this part of the state (Gámez and Ganster 2012:261). Despite the claims of the Secretary of Tourism—and other government officials—Los Cabos is not immune to crime and the influx of the drug trade.<sup>3</sup> Even the state government has acknowledged that their planning for the growth of Los Cabos has not been sufficient to deal with the problems that come with rapid urbanization (Gámez and Ganster 2012:261).

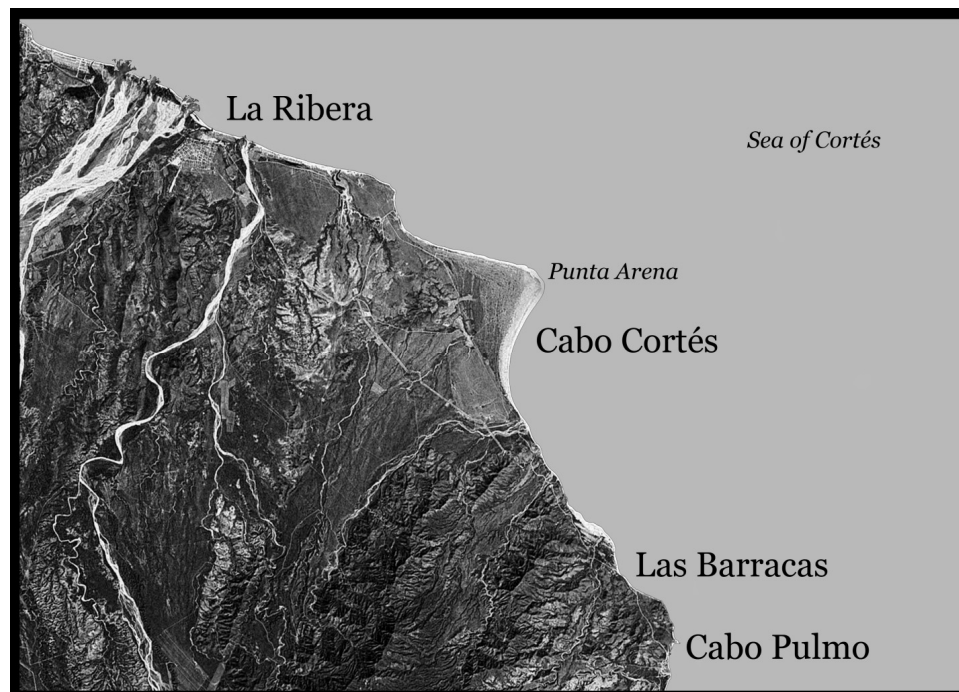


Figure 1.2. Aerial view of the East Cape from La Ribera to Cabo Pulmo. Punta Arena, at center, is the site for the now-defunct Cabo Cortés and its successor, Cabo Dorado.

These large-scale developments are usually justified because they supposedly create jobs for local people. While this is nominally true, it's important to look closer at

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Fox News 2013: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/10/20/former-leader-mexico-drug-cartel-killed-by-gunman-in-clown-costume/>; US News Travel: [http://travel.usnews.com/Cabo\\_San\\_Lucas\\_Mexico/Neighborhoods/](http://travel.usnews.com/Cabo_San_Lucas_Mexico/Neighborhoods/); BCSnoticias: <http://www.bcsnoticias.mx/durante-11-anos-el-chapo-visito-la-paz-y-los-cabos-con-ayuda-de-autoridades/>

what kind of employment opportunities are truly created. As Gerber (2007) points out, tourism development in BCS provides few lasting benefits to workers (in Gámez and Ganster 2012:261). Promising jobs is a sort of stock-in-trade of many tourism developers and government officials. But as Gámez and Ganster argue, jobs promised need to translate to jobs actually created, and those jobs have to lead to something more than temporary work. Most of the jobs associated with tourism development are low-skilled, and once the initial construction phase of development is over many of those disappear. What this often creates is a new migrant population, in conjunction with a local population, with few meaningful economic prospects. One of the biggest problems for locals when it comes to tourism development is that many of the jobs in the industry almost automatically favor non-locals who have the necessary skills to interact with foreign tourists (see Gámez and Ganster 2012:263). Most local people simply aren't qualified to work in the tourism sector that places like Los Cabos create—except in low paid, marginal positions as maids and construction workers.

Despite all of these well-documented drawbacks, and the possibility of alternative development models, the megaresort of Los Cabos is still the preferred model and inspiration for development throughout the state. This includes the East Cape of BCS—the relatively undeveloped part of the cape that suddenly became the new target for future tourism development.

### **The East Cape**

The East Cape is the other side of Los Cabos. It's the less-developed, less-accessible, and less well-known part of the cape region (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3). The East Cape begins just east of San Jose del Cabo and extends all the way to the pueblo of Los Barriles. The boundaries have not been formalized yet, however. There are two ways to travel there. You can either take the inland route, via Mexico 1, which winds you through the pueblos of Miraflores, Santiago, and Las Cuevas before heading to the coast, or you can take the unpaved East Cape road. It takes about an hour and a half to get from Los Cabos to Los Barriles via the first route. If you take the dirt road, it will take you about twice as long (or more, depending on road conditions) to make it to Los Barriles.

Most of the East Cape remains unpaved, giving the region a decidedly different character than what you'll find in Los Cabos (See Figure 1.4).

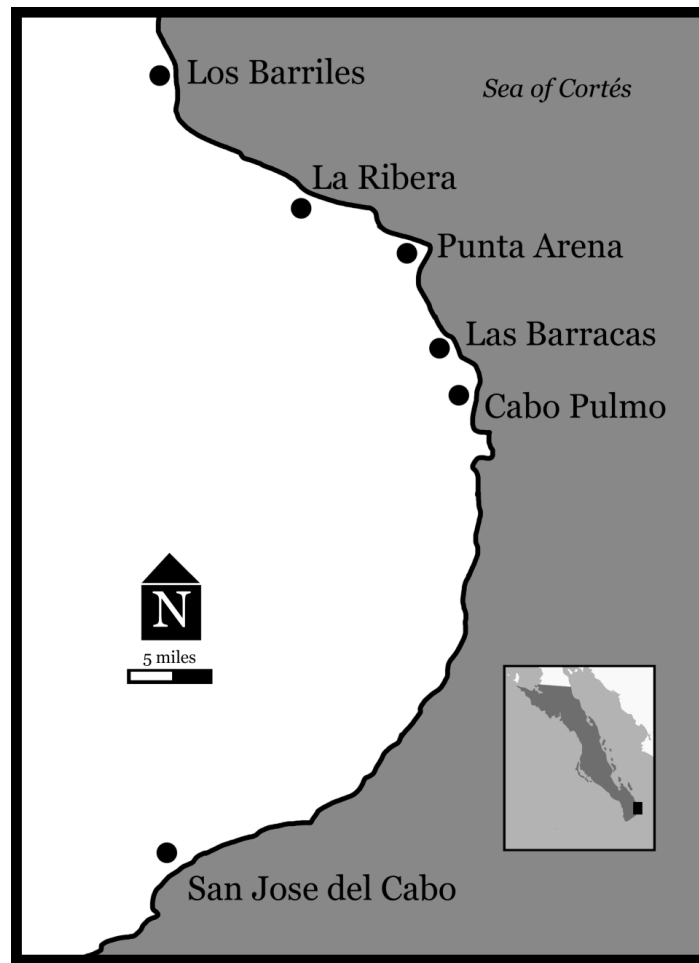


Figure 1.3. The East Cape of Baja California Sur, Mexico.

The story of the East Cape is different from that of Los Cabos. While both sides of the cape have been destinations for American fishermen and other travelers since the 1950s, development on the East Cape never took off the way it did on the west side. When Los Cabos started to expand in the 1980s and 1990s, the East Cape remained relatively off the radar. The communities of the East Cape consist of varying combinations of Mexican residents, newly arrived Mexican immigrants (mostly from states such as Sonora and Sinaloa), foreign born seasonal and permanent residents, and tourists (Weiant 2005; Gámez 2008). The biggest settlement on the East Cape is the pueblo of Los Barriles, which is composed of a mix of both Mexican and non-Mexican

residents. The official government census lists the population as 1174 (INEGI 2010). Informal population estimates place the population at about 5000 people, of which approximately half are non-Mexican residents. Part of the problem—and this is the case with many of the mixed communities on the East Cape—is that it’s difficult to obtain exact numbers of the non-Mexican resident population. The high percentage of non-Mexican residents in Los Barriles complicates population estimates. Regardless, Los Barriles is generally understood to have the largest population on the East Cape, even though the official numbers say otherwise. La Ribera is the second largest, with a population of 2050 (INEGI 2010), and a non-Mexican resident population of approximately 200-300. The rest of the communities along the East Cape are considerably smaller, ranging from communities of a few hundred people to small, single family ranchos and individual residences.



Figure 1.4. View of the East Cape road as it winds along the coast. Facing north. 2009.

According to Greg Niemann, “The oldest fishing resort along Baja’s East Cape is the legendary Rancho Buena Vista, built back in 1952 by Herb Tansey and established as a fly-in resort” (2002:224). These fishermen, with their Cessnas and dreams about conquering the famous marine life of Baja California, were some of the earliest to bring a vestige of tourism development to the area. By the 1970s, the East Cape had four resorts

that catered to visiting fishermen and tourists. Similar fly-in fishing resorts and hotels were built in Los Cabos around the same time.

Unlike Los Cabos, which is characterized by wide paved roads, dense urban areas, high end coastal hotels, and big commercial stores like Costco and Wal-Mart, the East Cape still has a lot of unpaved dirt roads, small ranchos, and open space. Many communities lack power and potable water. Health care services are extremely limited--if there's an accident, it's going to require a long trip out to the nearest hospital in San Jose del Cabo. While Los Barriles and La Ribera have some limited health care services, those with serious illnesses and injuries have to go to either San Jose del Cabo or La Paz (which is about 2.5 hours away by car). Life on the East Cape is rural, detached, disconnected, and self-sufficient. This can make living out on the East Cape difficult, but it's also what gives the place a certain quality and character that once existed in Los Cabos.

### **Cabo Pulmo**

During my research I lived and worked primarily in Cabo Pulmo, a small community with a population of approximately 200 residents located in the heart of the East Cape. It is not a big community. There's a single unpaved road that winds through the heart of Cabo Pulmo before it disappears down the East Cape. There are small stores, restaurants, and houses along the road, which is all surrounded by barbed wire fences. When you first enter the community you hit a sharp turn in the road—from there you can see some of the expat houses on the coast, including a large, green two story house that jumps out of the landscape. On the right side of the road, after you pass through a quick S-turn, is the subdelegado's office<sup>4</sup> and the community preschool. Next to those you will find the newly constructed Cabo Pulmo Learning Center. Beyond those buildings you'll pass by Tito's restaurant on the right side of the road (the first restaurant in Cabo Pulmo), and shortly after you'll see the sign, on the left, for another restaurant called "El Caballero." Nancy's restaurant is just across the small arroyo, followed by the Cabo Pulmo Beach

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<sup>4</sup> The subdelegado is the local political representative.

Resort (CPBR), founded by Dick Barrymore,<sup>5</sup> which acts as one of the main social centers of the community.

The resort is a residential development that begins at the water's edge and ends at the base of the foothills west of the community. It was built in three phases between the 1970s and the present. The whole community has a uniform look to it that is a unique combination of Mexican, Tahitian, and what might be called “expat” architecture. All of the roofs are covered with palapa (i.e. palm fronds). The houses themselves are painted in an array of bright colors—from blues to yellows to oranges and greens. The expat community is primarily powered through solar energy. One of the big draws of Cabo Pulmo is water—unlike many other communities on the East Cape, there's an aquifer that supplies enough water for most of the residents. When tourists come through Cabo Pulmo, they tend to shuttle through the Beach Resort, which rents out bungalows. The Resort also has a built in dive shop, with the “Coral Reef” restaurant located right on top (see Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5. View of the dive center and Coral Reef restaurant (top floor) at the Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort. This building sits at the entrance to the resort. Behind it, closer to the ocean, there are several bungalows that are often rented out to tourists.

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<sup>5</sup> Barrymore is one of the primary founding members of the expat community in Cabo Pulmo. He was part of a second wave of expat settler migrants who began arriving in the 1970s. An earlier wave, many of them from California, predated Barrymore—but I do not have much information on them at present.



If you keep following the unpaved road through town, you'll come to a fork. If you take the right fork, you head down the East Cape. Turn left, and you'll wind up on the Mexican side of the community, which is dominated primarily by the Castro family. Some expats refer to this side of town informally as "Castroville" (See Figure 1.6 for an aerial overview). It is readily apparent that the Mexican residents and expats live in quite different housing conditions. While most of the expats have solar power, this is not the case with Mexican residents, who have to rely on gas-powered generators for power. Water is another issue. While the water flows readily through the expat/tourist sides of town, during my fieldwork the Mexican residents still did not have a municipal water system.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1.6. Aerial map showing the main community of Cabo Pulmo (Scale: 1:10,000).

The dirt road that runs through the Castro side of town takes you directly to the ocean. On the way you'll pass Alicia's Restaurant, which is one of five restaurants in the community. As you walk toward the ocean, you'll see modest houses on each side, until you get closer to the water. First you'll pass by the "Cabo Pulmo Divers" shop, one of the main dive shops in town. On the right side of the road there's an open palapa with dive

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<sup>6</sup> The water politics in Cabo Pulmo also reflect many of the divisions and inequalities between the expats and the Mexican residents. In short, the expat community has enjoyed access to water because the Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort was able to secure official water rights through the Mexican government. This was not the case for the Mexican residents, who were not able to obtain their own permits (called "concessions") for many years. This was a source of incredibly tension between the two groups—many Mexican residents overly said the situation was unjust, and some argued that the expats were only able to get their water rights because the Mexican legal system is corrupt.

gear on display and a sign that says “East Cape Adventures.” There’s a motor home parked under the palapa—this belongs to the owner of this small business. As you walk on further, you’ll see the Casa Tamarindo, which is the headquarters of ACCP, on the left side of the road. To the east of the ACCP building is La Palapa, another restaurant. This one sits right on the water’s edge, and it’s a place where tourists, expats, and Mexicans often come together (although for the most part the Mexicans tend to be working in these situations, since it is very rare for them to actually eat out at these restaurants). In the evenings you’ll hear a the mixed up cacophony of conversation, clanking dishes, TV, and the ocean tide as it ebbs, flows, and ebbs again.

There is another small building just to the right of La Palapa. This is a place where you can rent gear for snorkeling, or rent kayaks. Beyond that, right on the small bluff sitting above the water, is yet another place for renting snorkels or kayaks. But here you can also set up fishing trips and dive excursions. All of these businesses are owned and operated by members of the Castro family. Depending on the tide, you can often see vestiges of Pulmo Reef just offshore. The reef itself juts into the coastline, so it’s actually very easy to swim out and get close to its peripheral fingers and edges. If you walk to the water’s edge and look north, you can see the arc of the small bay as it swings toward Pulmo Point. Out on the point you can still see the old Rock House, built decades ago, and the remnants of the schoolhouse that was destroyed by Hurricane John back in 2005. If you look south you can see the long, long beach that winds its way to Los Arbolitos, which is one of the most popular beaches in Cabo Pulmo.

It is difficult to gauge the exact population size of the community because many of the residents live a highly fluid, mobile lifestyle—this is especially the case with the expats. According to INEGI, there were 58 Mexican residents in 2005, and 50 in 2010 (this corresponds with a decrease in the total number of estimated households, from 21 in 2005 to 19 in 2010). The local community organization Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP) conducted an informal census in 2011 that resulted in an estimate of approximately 88 Mexican residents. So the range for Mexican residents is somewhere between 50 and 90 people. ACCP also conducted an informal survey of the expats with a corresponding population estimate between 60 and 140 people. Due to my own work in the community, which included questions about population size during interviews,

walking surveys of the community itself, and the use of Google Earth to estimate household sizes, the latter estimate seems to be more accurate. The number of structures in the expat parts of the community indicates that the population surpasses 60 people; I estimated approximately 94 housing units<sup>7</sup> with the help of Google Earth, my fieldnotes, and my experience living and working in the community between 2009 and 2012 (I estimated approximately 18 housing units for the Mexican residents with these methods, which closely approximates the INEGI 2010 estimate for number of households). The total number of residents is likely between approximately 190 and 228 people. However, in the summer months the number of expat residents drops dramatically to a maximum of about 25 people, with a total population of around 75-100 at most.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Cabo Pulmo was a small ranching and agricultural settlement with only a few residents. According to my interviews there were two primary landholders in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Meri Montaña Comelio and the Gonzales Canseco family. Ranching was one of the primary economic activities at the time, along with pearl fishing. There is not much information about the exact numbers of people living in the area at the time or the extent of either of these activities. At this time Cabo Pulmo was well regarded for its pearl beds. One version of the history of Cabo Pulmo is that when Meri Montaña died, she left all of her lands to Jesus Castro Fiol, the patriarch of the Castro family (see Cariño et al. 2008). According to this account, he inherited a total of 732 hectares of land and approximately 1000 head of cattle (Cariño et al. 2008:84). Due to the “poverty of the land,” many of the cattle supposedly died over the ensuing years (Cariño et al. 2008:84-85). This narrative, which is based off of interviews with members of the Castro family in 2006 (Cariño et al. 2008), explains the transition from an early ranching economy toward livelihoods based primarily on exploitation of marine resources.<sup>8</sup> It is unclear from the literature or my interviews whether ranching was ever the dominant livelihood strategy in relation to pearling in those early days. What is clear is that pearling was definitely a part of the picture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—although there are disputes about who was involved and

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<sup>7</sup> I refer to these as “housing units” as an attempt to avoid conflating this with a household survey, which is a difficult methodological issue. In this case, I was simply trying to identify the number of possible structures/places that house residents and families.

<sup>8</sup> These narratives also reflect a bias toward the Castro family’s version of the history of Cabo Pulmo.

to what extent (there are competing stories about whether or not Jesus Castro Fiol or Chico Cañedo was the best pearl diver in the area). Pearl fishing ended in the early 1940s, however, because of overexploitation and a disease epidemic that wiped out the pearl beds themselves (Cariño et al. 2008).

While the ranching economy did persist throughout the Baja peninsula throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the 1950s the small number of residents in Cabo Pulmo focused mostly on fishing. During the middle part of the century, shark fishing provided one of the primary sources of income. Jesus Castro was married and had five children by this time (he eventually had a total of eleven children). This was a time when Cabo Pulmo was still very isolated, which meant that any residents had to find a way to take care of their own needs. The residents of Cabo Pulmo subsisted mostly on local fish and sea turtle meat, supplemented with some produce grown in a small garden (Cariño et al. 2008:85). Some members of the Castro family also engaged in seasonal fishing in places such as Cabo San Lazaro on Isla Magdalena. Fishing did not generate much income in those days—it was primarily a means for residents to feed their families (Cariño et al. 2008:85). As I discuss in chapter four, up until the late 1960s very few people lived in Cabo Pulmo. As one resident explained to me, there were only three houses there when she arrived in 1970. Two of them were owned by members of the Cañedo family and the other was owned by a Castro. Despite the small population, by the 1960s the lack of regulations led to problems with the local fisheries. This was due, in part, to commercial fishing from outsiders who came from mainland Mexico, the United States, and elsewhere (Cariño et al. 2008:85-86). The rising popularity of tourism and sport fishing also likely contributed to this problem. By the late 1970s and early 1980s the fisheries started to show signs of depletion and, with some assistance from the local university in La Paz (UABCS), the community in Pulmo began working toward making the difficult transition from an economy based upon fishing to one based upon ecotourism (see Gámez 2008). This transformation went hand in hand with the creation of the Cabo Pulmo National Park (CPNP), which was first dedicated in 1995.

Today, nearly every working age resident of Cabo Pulmo is involved in the tourism economy, either directly (e.g. leading dive tours) or indirectly (e.g. working in restaurants, as domestic labor in the local hospitality economy, or as a caretaker/laborer

for expats). One hundred percent of the Mexican residents I interviewed were engaged with the tourism economy on a daily basis in one form or another. The entire economy of the community depends either on incoming tourists or the ebb and flow of visiting expats. When those flows of people and money stop—as they did in 2009 when the drug violence peaked and rumors about H1N1 spread throughout Mexico, it hits the Mexican residents especially hard. The only other option is to work in nearby La Ribera or move further away to places such as La Paz and Los Cabos.

The creation of the park coincided with the arrival of more expatriates (or “expats”) in Cabo Pulmo and the East Cape. Since the 1980s, more and more of these expats<sup>9</sup> have found their way to places like Barriles, Buena Vista, La Ribera, Cabo Pulmo, and other small communities along the cape. Changes to Mexican property law, especially in the 1990s, helped to facilitate the arrival of these new residents (see Cabral 1998; Lopez et al. 2006; Herrera 2012; Hartman N.D.). These expats migrated to the East Cape for a variety of reasons, including fishing, surfing, diving, wind-surfing, cheap property, and retirement. Cabo Pulmo, for example, was founded in part by a community of wind-surfers who used to camp on the beach in the 1970s and 1980s and who became some of the first expat property owners in the 1980s and 1990s.

The expat enclaves on the East Cape share many characteristics of other similar arrangements throughout the state (see Topmiller et al. 2011). The expat populations in La Ribera, Cabo Pulmo, and elsewhere on the East Cape live largely separate lives from those of the Mexican residents. This mirrors the findings in places such as Mulege and Loreto further north. The separation between these groups is cultural, economic, and geographic. Today, BCS is also one of the primary destinations for expatriates: between

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use the term “expat” to refer to the American, Canadian, and other foreign-born residents of the East Cape. I am using this term knowing that many people prefer other identity terms, such as “gringo,” “retiree,” or even “second home-owner” to the term expat. However, since the term “gringo” technically refers to US citizens (and can also be derogatory), many people on the East Cape aren’t actually retired, and not everyone actually owns a home, I decided to go with the more neutral term expat. Cohen (1977:6-7) discussed the “fuzziness” of this term, which was originally meant to describe people who were “driven away or banished” from their native countries. Despite these problems, Cohen used the term to describe “voluntary temporary migrants, mostly from affluent countries, who reside abroad” for one or more reasons. A significant number of people in my research site were opposed to the term, primarily because they felt it described them as people who were no longer connected with their home countries. Regardless, many people do use the term to refer to the population of people who exist somewhere between tourists and full-time residents.

1990 and 2000 the number of US-born seniors increased to 846, a 188 percent increase in five years (MPI 2006:28; see also Topmiller et al. 2011). Some of the largest expat enclaves in BCS are located in San Jose del Cabo, Todos Santos (on the Pacific Coast), La Paz, and Los Barriles. In Mexico at large, expat enclave communities can be found in places such as San Miguel de Allende (Guanajuato), Merida (Quintana Roo), Cancún (Quintana Roo), Ensenada (Baja California Norte), and Lake Chapala (Jalisco). Many of these expat residents come from the United States (see MPI 2006; see also Van Noorloos 2013; Topmiller et al. 2011; Kiy and McEnany 2010; Young 1997; Bratsberg and Terrell 1996; Stokes 1990; Truly 2002). Outside of Mexico, U.S. tourists and retirees continue to flow to expatriate enclaves throughout Latin America. Some of the most prominent destinations include Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, and Venezuela (MPI 2006). Mexico, however, has the vast majority of these migrants; recent estimates of the number of US-born citizens living in Mexico are well over the one million mark.



Figure 1.7. View of the main road through Cabo Pulmo, 2012. This image was taken during a local off road race, which is why so many of the local residents are lined up alongside the road. These sorts of events are common in the community—they are also some of the rare occasions in which the Mexicans and expats both participate in the same social event.

Cabo Pulmo is a small microcosm of the larger trends of expat migration and settlement throughout Mexico and Latin America. Like many other expat/local arrangements, it is a highly divided community...despite its small size (See Figures 1.7

and 1.8). The expats of Cabo Pulmo live and socialize primarily in the parts of the community associated with the three phases of the Cabo Pulmo Beach resort. The Mexican residents, which include three primary families and local migrants who work in the tourism sector, live largely apart from the expats. It's not that there is no interaction; expats and local Mexican residents do come into contact, but this is often limited to either 1) domestic service arrangements (i.e. housework or gardening) or other commercial exchanges (e.g. restaurants or dive services). Socially, the two sides of the community rarely intermingle. Despite this, the expats have contributed to shaping the community of Cabo Pulmo as it has developed, changed, and grown from a small fishing village (if that) to the relatively well-known ecotourism destination that it is today.

For the Mexican residents of Cabo Pulmo, the transition from fishing to ecotourism was not without difficulties and bumps along the way. When the park was first created in 1995, there was backlash and resistance from both the local Mexicans and the expat residents. The park itself was little more than a “paper park”<sup>10</sup> for years. But over time, a core group of residents rallied around the idea of the park, and the vast majority of the community made the difficult transition to working in a tourism-based economy. This has resulted in the creation of a wide range of tourism businesses focused on the exploration and enjoyment of the local reef, marine ecosystem, and surrounding landscape. The Cabo Pulmo National Park (CPNP) is currently an internationally recognized destination—it's also touted as a “sustainable” alternative to the kind of tourism development that dominated Mexico's past. For the residents of Cabo Pulmo, the park has become a source of pride and symbol of a growing attachment to ideals about conserving and preserving nature. By the time I started fieldwork in 2009, one of the biggest topics of conversation was the threat to the CPNP, which came in the form of a large-scale tourism development project known as Cabo Cortés.

### **The life and death of Cabo Cortés**

The project plans for Cabo Cortés<sup>11</sup> were similar to many other coastal development designs, including hotels, residential lots, commercial properties, two golf

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<sup>10</sup> A park that has been officially declared (on paper), but in reality has very little infrastructure in place.

<sup>11</sup> The primary financial backer of Cabo Cortés was the Spanish development company Hansa Urbana.



courses, and a marina. The overall scope of the project was to produce a high end luxury tourism destination similar to what you might find in Los Cabos. Like the internationally-recognized tourism city Cancún, the developers of Cabo Cortés also proposed to create a separate community to house laborers which would be located just inland from the heart of the project itself. This style of development has a clear predecessor in Cancún, which was also built to explicitly separate tourists from the local working population (see Castellanos 2010; Hiernaux 1999; see also Gregory for similarities in the Dominican Republic). The website touted the project as "a new way of experiencing Mexico in a luxurious, complete resort community." In all, the developers of Cabo Cortés proposed to build approximately 30,000 rooms--more than the nearby tourism zone of Los Cabos. In effect, the development meant the creation of a new tourism city in the heart of the East Cape.



Figure 1.8. View of Cabo Pulmo's coastline facing north. At left is the palapa that acts as a base for many of the Castro family's ecotourism operations. Cabo Pulmo point is on the right in the background. Note the erosion, which continues to threaten some of the homes and businesses that are located on the water's edge.

The project was first approved by Mexico's Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) in early 2008 (Latin American Herald Tribune 2011). The 2.3 billion dollar project was announced in early March of that year. The project site covered a total of 9,380 acres and included plans for a 490 slip marina, seven to fifteen hotels, 27,000 rooms for guest, 5,000 residences for workers, two 27-hole golf courses, two million square feet of commercial space, a private air strip, and a desalination plant



(NRDC 2012). The project was temporarily halted for review (after a local resident filed a complaint), but it was once again back online by March 2011. During my preliminary fieldwork in 2009 and 2010, the project was a looming presence. By the time I arrived for my year of fieldwork in December of 2011, the project was still a major force in local politics. It took on a strange, almost mythical figure for the region. It was the subject of many disagreements and conversations about economics, development, jobs, and conservation. People talked about Cabo Cortés all the time. It was in the newspapers, the subject of gossip and rumor, on local and national TV, blogs. It was everywhere. The main conflicts over the project started to congeal, over the years, into a battle between people who were sometimes glossed as being "pro-development" and those who were in favor of conservation, environmentalism, or something vaguely known as "sustainable development." This division dramatically simplified what was actually going on, but it also reflects the overly polemic divisions that existed at the time. Cabo Cortés became a highly symbolic, and often very polemic, battle of words, ideas, opinions, and interests. It was a metonym for larger issues, debates, fights, disagreements, and possible futures. In a sense, Cabo Cortés was a direct challenge to one particular vision for the East Cape, as exemplified by the national park in Cabo Pulmo, which focused on conservation, tourism development, and the controlled use of natural resources.

Despite the seemingly ubiquitous existence of Cabo Cortés, in many ways it was more of an idea--or rumor--than it was an actual material reality. Cabo Cortés was a future threat more than it was an immediate reality. The clearest material marker of its existence was a chain-linked fence that surrounded the project area, along with a couple of signs that signaled public beach access. Other than the media reports, the project website, and all of the local debates, there really wasn't much to the project. It was an idea more than anything—a way of thinking about change, progress, economics, and development. Cabo Cortés became a focus for my research because it was a powerful symbol of the very idea of development—and the seemingly never-ending tension between economic development, on the one hand, and environmental conservation, on the other. Cabo Cortés stood for hope, progress, and jobs, for many residents—but it was also a symbol of (potential) degradation, corruption, and the mass tourism development models that informed Los Cabos and other destinations.

## Fieldwork and Methods

My fieldwork took place between the years of 2009 and 2012. It all started with two summers of preliminary work in the summers of 2009 and 2010, followed by a yearlong stint of fieldwork from December 2011 to December 2012. I lived in Cabo Pulmo for the entire year. I conducted a total of 42 formal and 80 informal interviews with Mexican and non-Mexican residents, in conjunction with extensive participant observation with various groups directly involved in the development (and conservation) process. I had initially planned to cover Cabo Pulmo and La Ribera equally. But the realities of fieldwork changed my plans: trying to do interviews in both communities turned out to be more difficult than I'd imagined. In the end, my coverage of Cabo Pulmo was far superior to my coverage of La Ribera (31 of 42 formal interviewees were in Cabo Pulmo). This, of course, leads to a bias in my interviews, since opinions about development were far more homogenous in Cabo Pulmo than they were in La Ribera. Of the 31 people I interviewed in Cabo Pulmo, only two of them expressed any support for Cabo Cortés. In La Ribera, however, a large contingent of people was in favor of the project—they hoped it would bring jobs and money. I did not cover that segment of the population as well as I should have, but I did conduct informal interviews with some of them. Many of these interviews took place while I was giving people a ride to or from La Ribera. These were all working class residents of La Ribera, and each one of them told me they looked forward to the project and hoped it would succeed.

In terms of participant observation, I focused primarily on two groups: 1) Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP); and 2) the RARE chapter in La Ribera.<sup>12</sup> These were two of the most active community groups in the Cabo Pulmo-La Ribera region. I was also affiliated with the Baja Coastal Institute (BCI), a recently created NGO that focuses on marine conservation in Baja California, specifically on the East Cape. BCI was started by three expat residents of Cabo Pulmo, partially in response to the social conflicts, rumors, and intense debates about the Cabo Cortés development. The main goal of BCI was to “get the facts” about the situation through objective scientific

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<sup>12</sup> ACCP focuses on environmental conservation in and around Cabo Pulmo, and also on building wider collaborative networks with surrounding communities. RARE is conservation-based NGO that works in 56 countries around the world. The RARE chapter in La Ribera was directed toward creating and instilling local pride in the development of the community. These “pride campaigns” are a core part of RARE’s projects around the world.

research. The organization gave me a housing grant that provided me with a place to stay and conduct research from December 2011 through October 2012. Another important aspect of this is that BCI was also founded, in part, because of dissatisfaction with the primary Mexico NGO in Cabo Pulmo, known as Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP). Many of the expats felt that they could not trust the information coming from ACCP, in part because most of the meetings were conducted in Spanish. In this regard, BCI was another example of the cultural and political split that continues to shape life in Cabo Pulmo. One of the founders explained to me that a principal goal of BCI was to create a bridge between the two sides of the community. In practice BCI and ACCP tended to remain separate. Unfortunately, being associated with BCI became occasionally problematic when some of the membership tried to claim me as one of “their own” during some early community meetings. This claim of ownership presented some serious problems for my research plan, which was to interview key members of both sides of the community. I was able to overcome some of these difficulties by actively working with ACCP—and eventually joining the organization as a “guest” member in mid-2012.

Participant observation can encompass many things. I attended meetings, presentations, community gatherings, workshops, and lectures that were hosted by ACCP and RARE. I also attended weekly community meetings in Cabo Pulmo, which took place every Wednesday. But my participant observation did not stop there; I also spent considerable time with various social groups, doing what they did on a daily basis. Sometimes this meant hanging out and talking with members of the Castro or Cañedo family as they worked with incoming tourists. Other times this meant spending time in one of the four restaurants in town, which are the places where local Mexicans, tourists, and expats all come together. Beyond that, I became part of the expat network as well, and was often invited to social events, dinners, and other gatherings that took place.

The formal interviews focused on individuals' personal histories on the East Cape (how and why they ended up there), attitudes about development, opinions about Cabo Cortés, and finally future hopes for the region. One of the most fascinating questions ended up being very simple: What does development mean to you? Early on my interviews did not include this question, but once I realized just how differently people seemed to be defining and talking about development, I added the question into the

interview mix. I combined that very open-ended question with another question: What do you think about the development plans of Cabo Cortés? The Cabo Cortés question worked as a sort of Rorschach test that revealed individuals' understandings and hopes about what development could—or should—mean. Cabo Cortés provided a convenient, very specific starting point for talking about the development future of the East Cape. One final aspect of my methodology deserves a mention.

All of my interviews with the Mexican residents of Cabo Pulmo were obtained, scheduled, and conducted in person. This was not the case with the expats. I arranged many of the expat interviews via email, which is one of the primary ways they communicate with one another (during this time there was no cell service, but there was (slow) internet service. I even conducted a few of the expat interviews via email with people I have never actually met. This difference in communicative norms between the expats and Mexicans also helps explain some of the social divisions that exist between the two groups. In order to contact expats and successfully set up meetings for interviews, getting email addresses was imperative. The communicative difference between the Mexican residences and the expats was often a simple matter of access to and frequent use of internet technologies. This impacted my methodology, but was also a telling example of how and why the two groups remained socially disconnected in many ways.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter one draws heavily from Marxian theories of value to analyze the impending commoditization of the East Cape. This chapter discusses some of the problems associated with rising land values along the East Cape and how they result from market integration and commoditization. My main argument is that the expansion of real estate markets ultimately ends up dispossessing local inhabitants—but this happens in a variety of forms. In some cases people literally lose their claims to the land itself; in other cases what they lose, in a process of slow erosion, is the right to participate in the development process, and, the ability to define what “value” means in the first place. This expanding tourism and real estate development along the East Cape is another “market of dispossession” (Elyachar 2005).

Chapter two focuses on the “social meaning(s)” of development. This highly ethnographic chapter focuses on nine individuals (Mexican and expat) in order to look closer at local meanings, understandings, and desires when it comes to development. While some people are stringently for or against development, many say they are not “against” development but would simply prefer to see either “sustainable development” or another alternative to the mass tourism model that has already taken over the nearby Los Cabos tourism zone. These interviews highlight very common concerns about rising crime, environmental degradation, and the loss of access to local resources that often comes with large-scale coastal tourism development.

Chapter three is a critical examination of the concept of “sustainable development.” This chapter looks at the concept of sustainability as it applies to the community of Cabo Pulmo. Cabo Pulmo is often talked about as a potential model for alternative, sustainable coastal tourism. It has a marine park that was created in 1995 that has achieved considerable success in recent years (in terms of rebounding biodiversity). However, despite discourses and optimism about sustainability, the community of Cabo Pulmo faces several key challenges, including: 1) long-term fights over land ownership; 2) economic and social segregation among its residents (especially between expats and Mexicans); and 3) highly divided conceptions about who is and who is not truly a part of “the community” in Cabo Pulmo. At present, Cabo Pulmo may only appear sustainable because it’s relatively small. It is already plagued by many of the conflicts, inequalities, and divisions—albeit at a small scale—which are prevalent in places such as Cancún and Los Cabos. Actual sustainability will require greater community participation, openness, and compromise. The final point of this chapter is that true sustainable development will place the interests of local communities ahead of the production of tourism revenue.

Chapter four explores the problematic concept of community and how it relates to the current social conflicts in Cabo Pulmo. This chapter picks up where the previous chapter left off and explores the clashes, conflicts, debates, and disagreements about the idea of community in Cabo Pulmo. In much of the media coverage, Cabo Pulmo is often cast as a small, local Mexican community. These media portrayals are dominated by members of one highly active family that has become the “face of Cabo Pulmo” both nationally and internationally. This act of speaking for the rest of the community is both

effective and fraught with tensions and complications. This family overshadows the other two Mexican families, and generally avoids mentioning the existence of approximately 200 expat residents. They also use a selective telling of history to fortify their connections to place. Based upon formal and informal interviews, it's apparent that the actual history of Cabo Pulmo differs from the narratives popularized by this family. Many of the divisions stem from fights over land and titles that began in the 1970s. These "land wars" remain the primary threat to community cohesion—and longer term hopes for "alternative" or "sustainable" development.

Finally, in the conclusion I discuss the ongoing politics of development that persist all along the East Cape—despite the supposed "death" of Cabo Cortés in mid 2012. My central argument is that social conflicts over development are often based in deeper, fundamental political struggles over land—and the ability to participate in the development process itself. This represents an important contribution to our understanding of the political and social dynamics of development, which, in the literature, is often framed in abstract terms of debate that remain highly detached from the lived realities of the people who stand to lose the most if development goes awry. This is an explicit critique against much of social science development theory, which is often trapped in a university-based academic system that has little relevance or meaning for communities around the world who these academics "speak for."

Much of the contemporary development literature seems stuck in a pattern of debate about the possible meanings of development—whether it's positive, negative, liberating, or oppressive—that rages on endlessly. Meanwhile, around the world, people are losing their land, rights, and access to places in a process that has more to do with raw politics and power than whether or not development is or is not a positive social force. Since development can mean so many things in so many places, the terms of debate need to be changed—if not outright terminated—in favor of an approach that foregrounds an examination of local politics that can then be set within a wider cultural, economic, and political context. In short, I argue that conflicts over development should be seen as struggles for inclusion and participation above all else. If academics are going to be seen as relevant to what is happening under the guise of development, then it's time to shelve the endless discussions about the meanings of a process that has no singular meaning and

get to addressing the politics of inclusion and exclusion. The true problem of development may, in the end, be a matter of democratic participation (or a complete lack thereof).

The East Cape is one case in point among many. Yet somewhat ironically, local struggles over the future of the East Cape are sometimes discussed in terms that mimic many of the academic debates about the pros and cons of development. It is common to hear about the people who are “anti-development” on one side, and the “pro-development” forces on the other. This follows along with a well-entrenched narrative that pits the protection of the environment against economic opportunities. But these kinds of debates obscure the deeper politics of development in the region, which are contingent upon who owns the land itself—and therefore has the legal and political rights to determine the future of the East Cape. Few people on the East Cape were completely against development; most expressed the desire to see smaller-scale development that took into account the interests of local places and communities. The real battle on the East Cape is not a polemic contest over whether or not development can or should happen; instead, it’s a vital struggle over who has the right to be in this place—and to participate in the creation of its future.

The Cabo Cortés project, with its powerful economic and political backers, was one more attempt to do development the way it has been done for so long. It was a project geared toward the generation of revenue and, most importantly, outside interests. It was also yet another attempt to make “development” appear to be a contest between “progress” and the small-minded interests of local communities and environmentalists. But it was really about power—who had the power to control the future of the East Cape.

While the community of Cabo Pulmo was able to stave off Cabo Cortés for the present moment, it remains unclear how long this will last. Groups such as ACCP claim the death of Cabo Cortés as a clear victory, but it may well be that the global economic crash of 2008 played a pivotal role in stopping the large project. The community of Cabo Pulmo and its allies were able to work together to build opposition to large scale tourism development on the East Cape. But their success may have culminated with a stroke of luck that came in the form of catastrophic economic crash that effectively killed most development efforts for several years. The community of Cabo Pulmo—not to mention

the East Cape as a whole—may have just barely averted the kind of mass tourism development that has made Cancun an economic giant (for now) and a social disaster. Considering the fractured nature of *many* communities along this coastline—and tenuous relations *between* communities—it remains unclear how long the region's residents will be able to hold off the forces of mass tourism development.

We need to understand local contexts and politics. But we also need an understanding of how those local meanings fit within wider global and historical processes. The current development politics in Cabo Pulmo must also be understood within the larger histories of Mexico and North America, and the tremendous, ever-growing global market of international tourism. Here I look at what value, development, sustainability, and community mean in relation to the local histories and experiences of people who live and work on the East Cape (with a focus on Cabo Pulmo). Still, those local meanings and politics must be connected with wider histories and processes that create similar patterns of conflict, development, and dispossession around the world. The pattern of expatriate expansion and residential development that we see on the East Cape is not a unique global phenomenon. My framework of analysis draws heavily from Wolf (1982), and Hart (1986, 2001, 2013), who advocate linking ethnography and global history in order to transcend some of the limitations of traditional ethnographic investigations.

The pressure continues on the East Cape. Once seen as a remote, worthless, valueless place, it is now seen as prime real estate for development and investment. It is a valuable place, in more than one sense. For many of the residents, including those from places such as Cabo Pulmo, it is valuable as a home, place of work, or destination of escape. It is valuable in numerous personal, cultural, historical and incalculable ways. But it is also valuable in the strict economic and monetary sense—for many people the economic potential of the landscape far outstrips those other values.

Despite years of organization and resistance, not to mention the cancellation of two versions of the same large-scale project, powerful interests continue to push for mass tourism development on the East Cape. The East Cape is an attractive place because it has so many of the necessary elements that could make it another highly productive mass tourism destination. There is incredible money in international tourism, and countries



such as Mexico will go to almost any length to get in on the game. But the price to play is steep. As much research has shown (see Butler 1980), tourism destinations have a limited shelf life. They can only be attractive, new, and appealing for so long. Because of this, the global tourism market is a perfect illustration of the idea that problems in global capitalism aren't actually fixed—they are simply moved around geographically (Harvey 2010). Around the world, declining tourism destinations around are replaced, again and again, by new projects, resorts, and residential communities that appeal to consumers who seem to be constantly in pursuit of the latest, hippest, or most exclusive places that money can buy. The East Cape is just one of many new candidates for this seemingly unending, highly destructive cycle.

By early 2014, a new large-scale development was proposed, once again, for the Punta Arena region. The project, which had the support of former presidents and other important political players, was backed by some of the very same people who had been behind Cabo Cortés. The new project took the name “Cabo Dorado,” which literally means “the Golden Cape.” With a new mantle of “sustainability” and 3.6 billion dollars of foreign investment, it was yet another attempt to bring a new level of development to the East Cape. But Cabo Dorado too was shelved because of environmental concerns—how long this latest stalemate will last remains to be seen.

The community of Cabo Pulmo—and the East Cape as a whole—may have narrowly averted the kind of large-scale tourism development that has already engulfed Los Cabos and much of the eastern coastline of Quintana Roo (i.e. Cancun and the Maya Riviera). My analysis suggests that the residents of Cabo Pulmo will probably not have the sort of luck they did in 2012 again. While the campaign against Cabo Cortés received considerable international attention and did undoubtedly contribute to its cancellation, something more has to be done if the region is to avoid a future in which development is the result of external planning, national economic indicators, and outdated mass tourism models. Many residents of the East Cape hold out hope for a form of small-scale development that is participatory and serves local interests. They place immense importance on the idea of “sustainability,” which many see as a powerful alternative to traditional development models. But even the rhetoric of sustainability has been captured

by powerful interests—Cabo Dorado is simply Cabo Cortés recast with a superficial veneer that gives lip service to the concept of sustainable development.

What truly makes the situation on the East Cape troubling is the slow process of alienation that is transforming the land, piece by piece, into commodities that can be fenced and sold in global markets. This leaves many communities in a highly precarious situation. In Cabo Pulmo, where the whole community seems to be fighting over who owns the land, on the one hand, and who is and is not part of the community, on the other, longstanding resistance to projects with the economic and political backing of Cabo Dorado seems unlikely. One can only get lucky for so long. While the lack of clarity in land ownership may help to forestall development in the short-term (and it has), continual infighting at the local level will only undermine longer term solutions and efforts. With such an unstable land tenure situation in Cabo Pulmo, it's nearly impossible for a viable community to survive in any meaningful sense.

## **Chapter 2: The value of a place**

*We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.*

-Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*.

### **The shifting terrain of value**

Summer, 2009. I was standing on a bluff overlooking the rocky reefs and sandy beaches at a development called “Cabo Vinorama,”<sup>13</sup> located right in the middle of the East Cape. The landscape was shaped into a series of flat, sellable parcels, each marked with numbers. Some were marked sold, many weren’t. A nearby sign showed a map of the overall project, and a small photocopied piece of paper that listed the prices of the lots, which ranged from about 70,000 to as much as 600,000 USD.

There was a gate and a small structure at the entrance of the development. Beyond that, there were no homes built at the time. Cabo Vinorama was little more than an idea. Development, still in the conceptual stages. It was the price sheet that interested me most. In the 1980s, it was possible to buy coastal land in this area for a few thousand dollars. Before that, much of the region was considered relatively worthless. This shift from worthless to valuable is the focus of this chapter. What makes a place suddenly “valuable,” and what does this mean in an anthropological sense? The transformation from worthless to valuable, as Li (2014) explains, is a matter of shifting discourses (how people think and talk about land), relationships (how different groups of people relate to and use land), materialities (e.g. fences that create boundaries), and technologies (e.g. mapping technologies that re-inscribe the landscape) that help to reframe land as a resource.

But the East Cape—its landscapes and places and communities—has always held meaning and import for the people who have lived there. There is no question about this. It is not terra incognita. It is not empty of history, of humanity, and value. But what happens when a place, with so many histories and meanings, is suddenly demarcated and

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<sup>13</sup> As you will notice throughout this article, the word “Cabo” is a common addition to the names of many development projects throughout the East Cape. This trend was started with San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, which are collectively referred to as “Los Cabos.” Today, many new project continue this pattern, resulting in a landscape of “Cabos” and lots of confusion.

labeled as “worth” \$600,000 dollars? What sort of process is taking place, and what does it mean for the people and communities who live in this place? What does it mean to make a physical place commensurable with money?

From the perspective of the outside world, and even the Mexican government, the East Cape has been an unknown, disconnected, and therefore “worthless” place for decades. Some might argue that it has been valueless for centuries.<sup>14</sup> It was a place with no value, monetary or otherwise. These narratives, about a former wasteland emerging as a meaningful, valuable place, full of potential, are a powerful part of the commoditization process. They frame a place as devoid of history and meaning and therefore ready, free, and waiting for the kinds of improvements and investments that will supposedly unleash their true value. As Li explains, these kinds of processes envisage land as available, in part, because it’s either not being used or it’s being under-utilized (2014:592). This is similar to Spivak’s (1990) concept of “worlding,” in which colonial agents depicted territories as marginal, empty, uninscribed earth—blank slates ready and waiting for imperial expansion. In such processes, all previous histories, claims, and people are written out of the picture (Li 2014:592).

However, as the tourism and real estate markets have expanded into the East Cape, things have changed. Formerly worthless plots of land are now considered “high value” and priced accordingly. Money is a fundamental part of this process—as are maps, stories, laws, real estate web sites and other social practices that re-inscribe the land with a particularly market-based value. This process of transformation—from valueless to valuable—is not automatic. It’s also not free from conflicts, disagreements, and outright violence (see Li 2014).

Like many geographic locales around the world, the East Cape has experienced several waves of incorporation and subsequent disconnection with wider processes (see Murphy and Stepick 1991 for one example). Global capitalism is just one of these processes. As we will see below, the East Cape was briefly brought into the global capitalist economy during the peak years of the pearl boom. This integration had a

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Father Jacob Baegert’s introduction to his work, which begins with this sentence: “Everything concerning California is of such little importance that it is hardly worth the trouble to take a pen and write about it” (Baegert 1979) Baegert was a Jesuit priest who lived in Lower California for seventeen years.

particular character and a finite lifespan. Today, the East Cape is in the middle of a renewed integration into the global capitalist market. Julia Elyachar argues that such processes, while they entail integration, also result in acts of *dispossession*. Her work with the craftsmen and unemployed youth of Cairo highlights how integration into the market system results in a loss of the conceptual terms through which people once organized their knowledge, actions, and meanings (2005:8). This is, she argues, dispossession of the ability to determine the very meaning of value (2005:6-7). In a similar fashion, in BCS today the meaning of value is shifting, opening the way for global investment (see Li 2014) and local dispossession. This shift is the result of a series of processes that make the East Cape—once unique and incomparable—increasingly more recognizable, interconnected, and comparable with other places and pieces of land around the world. In other words, this value shift is a matter of making the East Cape commensurable in the global real estate market.

### **Making the world commensurable (value theory in brief)**

What does it mean to say that something has “value”? One way to think about value is that it’s a relative measure of the importance or meaning of a given thing, idea, or place (see Graeber 2001). How that importance is actually expressed and measured differs dramatically depending on the society or social group in question. This importance, or meaning, has to be understood within what Graeber referred to as a “wider system of meaning” (2001:254). Value is not created or understood in social isolation; it always exists within surrounding social totalities, whether “real or imagined” (Graeber 2001).

Both Adam Smith and David Ricardo sought to find a systematic way to measure the value of things that humans produce. Smith formulated a Labor Theory of Value, which he used to argue that the true source of any good or commodity stems from the human labor that it took to produce it. Although Ricardo disagreed with aspects of Smith’s argument, he too adopted a Labor Theory of Value. Each of them felt that there was an accurate way to measure value, prices had inherent problems, and accounting for human labor could rectify the situation.

Karl Marx also examined value in terms of labor. But his project differed dramatically from the work of Smith and Ricardo. Rather than trying to find a way to establish a fair, just, or accurate measure of the value of all things, Marx's project was to use value as a way to critique capitalist conditions (see Elson 1979). His goal, in works such as *Capital*, was to point out that capitalism was a system in which human beings were simply means to the ultimate end of producing wealth, rather than the reverse (see Graeber 2013:223; Hart 2011:5). Marx used the concept of value to create a powerful, systematic illustration of what happens to human creative energies under capitalism. In the end, humanity's efforts under capitalism are misrepresented and concealed by the money system. As Graeber points out, Marx's argument in *Capital* is truly about the fetishization of money (2013:225).

In the capitalist system of production, money is a representation of human labor power expressed in a socially recognizable form. Money also *appears* to be the source of the labor power that it represents (Graeber 2013:225). Marx's analysis in *Capital* exposes the social relations that money helps conceal. In short, human labor becomes abstracted when its products enter into market relations with all other commodities (i.e. other products of human labor), resulting in a system in which real relations between people are masked as social relations between things (Marx 1990:166; Hart 2011:9). Money facilitates this process of abstraction.

What does money do? It is a medium of exchange that allows for comparison and commensurability. Money is what allows us to think about human labor in terms of equal, interchangeable units (Graeber 2005:13). In a capitalistic system, value becomes a "quantifiable abstraction" because it comes into being through exchange or money transactions (Graeber 2005:13). Outside of the realm of commoditized economic systems in which labor can be bought and sold, we stop talking about value and instead talk about *values* in the plural sense. These values, whether religious, familial, political, or aesthetic, are "inherently incommensurable" (Graeber 2005:13) and therefore impossible to reduce to a common denominator.

In terms of value, this process of making things commensurate is what interests me most here. Tourism and real estate development can be viewed, in many senses, as a process through which unique, incomparable places are made comparable and

commensurate. Each location may be unique, but the process of creating planned communities and tourism resorts, based as they are upon certain models, serves to make destinations both appealing and uniform in many ways. A new Radisson hotel may be constructed in a unique geographic place, but the layout of the hotel, with its standardized rooms, dining areas, pools, and restaurants results in a sort of “sameness” in locations around the world (see Saragoza 2010). In this way, tourists are able to experience the differences of Mexico and Baja California through comfortable, recognizable ways. Wilk sought to delineate this kind of differentiation through intelligible sameness with his concept of “structures of common difference” (Wilk 1995). In Baja, the process culminates when formerly isolated, unique, and unknown places find their way to international real estate and tourism sites, where they can be compared, contrasted, and evaluated in relation to other destinations around the world.

Marx’s theory of value focuses on how the production of commodities obscures relations between people. On the East Cape, I’m not looking at the production of commodities per se but instead the production and commoditization of places, or destinations, which are in turn purchased (or, in the case of tourism, rented for a period of time). Both can be seen as processes of alienation. But what, exactly, is alienated?

In Marx’s analysis, humans are alienated from the products of their own labor and their relationships with other humans. As mentioned above, money is fundamental in making this possible. My argument, in the case of tourism development in BCS, is that alienation comes in the form of the loss of the unique local histories and meanings of each place. The climax of alienation is *dispossession*—when people literally lose access to and ownership of the land itself. Once again, money plays a vital role, in this case ultimately making it impossible for many people to remain in place as land values rise. This is because, as Keith Hart notes, when it comes to money, “Some people have lots of it, and most people have much less than enough” (2001:3). Money separates and divides. It dissolves community, ultimately becoming community itself (see Marx, *Grundrisse* 1993).

By restricting access to and control of place, rising land values serve as a powerful first step in this dissolution and remaking of community that functions primarily through the mechanics and meanings of money. On the East Cape, this process is just

beginning—but the effects and repercussions are already undeniable. On the other side of the cape, in Los Cabos, the process is far more complete: the urban *colonias* that surround the tourism zone speak to both dispossession and the entrenched unevenness of development. Los Cabos is a place where many local Mexicans have been almost completely alienated and dispossessed, as they work, day in and day out, to serve the needs of the tourism economy.

Based upon my fieldwork and experiences in BCS, I use value theory as one way of understanding this process. First, following Marx, I view value as a dynamic social process. Value is not static, given, or set in stone. It is a relative measure within a “wider system of meaning” (Graeber 2001). As John Logan and Harvey Molotch once wrote, “A place is defined as much by its position in a particular organizational web—political, economic, and cultural—as by its physical makeup and topographical configuration” (1987:43). Depending on where it fits within wider social frameworks, the meaning of any given place can change quite dramatically. The Baja California peninsula is a case in point. The (perceived) value of the peninsula for outsiders has shifted radically over the past 500 years, all depending on its place within the wider global economy. I use the histories of the rise and fall of Baja’s pearl fisheries to illustrate this historical, processual aspect of value.

I also explore value on the East Cape in terms of connections and disconnections, formalization, and geographic isolation. The region is currently embroiled in social disputes about who owns the land, in part because of rapidly rising land values. Those land values are based upon real estate speculation and the promise of future development. The East Cape has been home for generations of local Mexicans since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was also quite disconnected from the rest of the world in many senses. This sense of disconnection is what drew in some of the region’s early tourists, including streams of American fishermen. But that flow of travelers and tourists eventually resulted in an eventual connection with growing tourism and real estate markets—and more visitors, tourists, and new residents.

The growth of tourism and real estate development was, in turn, dependent upon the character of land ownership in the region. In order to market, sell, and develop the East Cape as *real estate*, it was necessary to map and document the land itself. This



process of mapping came with formalization of land ownership, a highly political process that led to many disagreements that continue to this day. This process of mapping, however, was a crucial aspect of making the East Cape into a comparable, commensurate place.

Despite growing knowledge of the East Cape, and increasing development pressure, one of the last components of integration into the global market system seems to be one of the simplest. At present, the East Cape remains largely unpaved, and until that happens, large-scale development will be held at bay. The geographic isolation of the East Cape has served the dual purpose of shielding it from outside influence and change (to a certain degree), yet also severely limiting economic opportunities. The lack of roads has played an important role in shaping the meanings, histories, and memories about life in small communities such as Cabo Pulmo. The looming presence of a future paved road brings both the threat and promise of social and economic change.

At this point, it's important to mention that the East Cape remains an open question. While certain patterns of inequality, segregation, and development are already in place, the future is by no means set. The fate of dispossession is by no means certain, even if it appears imminent at times. As I argued above, the process of value creation is just that: a process. Values and meanings come and go, over time, like the ebbing tide. The histories of pearl fishing are a case in point about the fluctuating, fickle, and anything-but-permanent nature of value.

### **Pearls before Swine Flu**

Was the East Cape ever a worthless, valueless, wasteland? Absolutely not. The place has always been meaningful, important, and valuable for the people who have lived there since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historically, the East Cape had a very small population, composed of the ranchos and fishing communities peppered throughout the region. It was, however, relatively worthless to many *outsiders*. Things change, of course, and the newly acquired value of the East Cape stems, at least in part, from the rise of the sort of “sun and sea” tourism, described in the introduction, that has given new meaning to coastal communities all around the world. That shift alone made thousands of formerly worthless coastal stretches all around the world suddenly acquire a new value. But the

process of change is not new, and this is where it's important to pay attention to the histories of place. While the East Cape is often characterized as a sort of *tabla rasa* with no history or value, this is not the first time it has been connected to wider, global systems of meaning and value creation. Long before the current rise in tourism and real estate markets, before Swine Flu helped shut down the economy, Baja California was known for its pearls—and the East Cape was one place among many where people went in search of those riches.

The Gulf of California was an important zone for pearling since the 1700s (Cariño et al.. 2008:80). Pearl beds in the region were exploited off and on until the early 1940s. Pearl hunters roamed from Cabo San Lucas all the way to Bahia Los Angeles. Cabo Pulmo was well known for a high concentration of pearls (Cariño et al.. 2008:81). It was specifically mentioned as part of the *Distrito del Sur* (Southern District) in Esteva's 1857 *Pesca de la Perla in Baja California*. The high value of pearls led to concessions all along the Baja California coastline between 1884 and 1912. This took place under the regime of Porfirio Diaz, which sought economic expansion and capital investment, often with little regard to social costs (Wolf 1999; Meyer et al. 2003:435-446).

There were five large pearling companies in the region. *Compañía Perlífera de la Baja California* (CPBC) was founded in 1885. Its concessions covered the waters adjacent to the present day East Cape. CPBC employed more than 400 people, had a large fleet of ships, and was one of the main economic players in the Baja California economy. In 1893, CPBC merged with several other pearling operations to create the *Compañía Perlífera de Baja California Sucesores*. But this venture was short-lived: the same year as the merger took place, all of the rights to the new company were ceded to The Mangara Exploration Limited Co., a British company founded in London. The result was almost complete foreign control of the peninsula's pearl resources (Cariño et al.. 2008:82; see also Cariño 1998).

According to Cariño et al. (2008), the overall trend in the pearling industry included a strong concentration of capital, displacement of local divers and suppliers, poor working conditions, and overall loss of access to and control of resources for local populations. These are historical examples of the kind of that often comes with incorporation into global markets. The Mangara Exploration Ltd Co. contributed heavily

to these trends of dispossession—and the Mexican government seemed all too eager to participate in the process. The company employed consistently destructive pearl extraction methods and never met the necessary obligations that were required to obtain government concessions. Despite these glaring problems, the Mexican government agreed to extend Mangara's concession until 1916. The government was clearly sympathetic to Mangara's cause. This is undoubtedly due to the tremendous global value of pearls in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to Cariño and Monteforte (2009:54), pearls were a “chief luxury commodity” for more than 2,000 years. American pearls, which include those found in the waters of Baja California, were one of the most prized luxury items in Europe. They were also the base upon which Spanish wealth was built (Cariño and Monteforte 2009:55). Pearls were the primary export from the New World until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, when they were replaced by silver and gold. Still, pearls remained among the most important and valuable raw materials that flowed from the New World to the Old.

Historically, there were two primary market centers for natural pearls. The first was Bombay, India. The second, which rose to global dominance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was Paris, France (Cariño and Monteforte 2009:57). American pearls were known as “Panama pearls,” whether they came from Baja California, Panama, etc. In Paris jewelry stores, they sold for more than one thousand times their original cost (59). At the turn of the century, demand skyrocketed just as the resource supplies started to dwindle:

Prices peaked in the 1920s. By 1930, however, it was already clear that the natural beds were nearing exhaustion. Coupled with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the depletion of the pearl beds spelled disaster for the pearling market in Baja California (Cariño et al.. 2008:83; Cariño and Monteforte 2009:59). A widespread pearl disease epidemic in 1938-1939 only exacerbated the problems for an already dying industry. By 1940 the Mexican government tried to step in and create a ban on pearling, but the damage had already been done. The world economy did finally recover after the end of WWII, but by then natural pearls were exhausted, and already replaced by cultured pearls (Cariño and Monteforte 2009:59). While nacre<sup>15</sup> markets were slightly more

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<sup>15</sup> Nacre is the shiny, hard material that coats the inside of some mollusk shells and the outer coating of pearls.

resilient, the introduction of plastics killed those markets around mid-century as well. The Gulf of California was of the “last bastions of pearl oyster fishing” in the world (Cariño and Monteforte 2009:61). When the industry died, it was a devastating blow for the peninsula’s economy—and for its position within the larger global economic system.

The rise and fall of the pearl industry illustrates the exploitative nature of value creation in capitalist markets (see Wolf 1982). The boom and subsequent bust of the pearling days in Baja still lives in the memories of people who live in Cabo Pulmo, Las Barracas, and La Ribera. They tell stories about the great pearl divers—the friends and family members who once took part in that lucrative, and exploitative, social phenomena that harnessed tremendous energy and effort to satisfy a peculiar, culturally-inflected human attraction to pearls. It was a period of intense integration within larger markets and socio-cultural systems of meaning and desire. While some remember these stories, in many respects they have been relegated to the comfortable category of “history,” lost within the current milieu of land speculation, wars over ownership, and dreams of the future. But these histories of the pearling industry tell a story about value—and depletion—that should, perhaps, give pause to those who jump headlong into the next big boom.

### **Land, integration, and dispossession**

The *Gringo Gazette* is a sardonic, sarcastic, and highly popular newspaper that covers much of the news, gossip, and happenings throughout the cape region of Baja California Sur. Spend some time in the region and you’re sure to see it. It seems as if every small taco shop, grocery store, and hotel has a rack full of the free publication. If you want an entry into the lives of the English-speaking, expat, retiree, and second-home owning population of the East Cape, this is a good place to start. The Gazette may not be the most accurate—or even balanced—source of news that ever existed, but it does provide some starting points for understanding life in the region.

The East Cape “land wars” erupted around 2007. The mere promise of future development resulted in increased land speculation—and conflicts over the legal title to various parcels of land quickly ensued. From the January first, 2007 edition:

**East Cape Land Battles Heat Up Along With Land Values: Everyone is afraid of squatters now and is fencing and guarding against them**

For decades nobody could give land away on the East Cape, which stretches along the shoreline north of San Jose. There was no paved road, no electricity, and very little water. There is still no paved road, no electricity, and very little water, but now there is land speculation, fueled by the \$600 million investment in the new marina, new golf courses, and new housing developments.

This article, written under the pseudonymous, tongue-in-cheek byline "Heidi Valuables," tells the story of a battle over land and value that erupted on the East Cape of Baja California Sur between 2007 and 2008. It's a story, once again, about land that was once considered undesirable. But that all changed. The Gazette explains that homes were being built "asshole to elbow," selling for \$3 million apiece—even though many of them lack the standard infrastructure that should come with a home of that price (like a sewer system). "They're getting away with selling these homes without installing the normal infrastructure," she writes, "because the developers run the government ... and there is no oversight." It was a time of tremendous change, brought about by radical transformation in how people perceived—and acted upon—the value of the land.

So what happened? Why did so many people start buying and building on the East Cape? What changed? It's not as if the East Cape was completely unknown outside of BCS. In fact, many expats and other travelers had known about it since at least the 1950s (see Mayo 2002). Some of the first resorts on the East Cape were built around the same time as Cabo San Lucas, but the histories of these two places are dramatically different. One was developed, one wasn't.

James—a US citizen—first visited the East Cape in 1969, when he was 14 years old. When he first arrived, he said, "There was nothing there." In Cabo Pulmo there were just a few shacks, James explained, and about 18 to 25 people, mostly from the Castro Fiol family (one of the dominant families in Cabo Pulmo today). "The land back in the 1970s," he continued, "had no value—or very little." In those days, Cabo Pulmo wasn't even a fishing community, he said. James describes it as an out of the way place, far more remote than places like Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo. The region was considered worthless, according to James, because of its *disconnection* from wider markets and social systems.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Cabo San Lucas was in the process of transforming from a cannery town into a tourism town. The fish cannery was the first big commercial success in Cabo San Lucas, beginning in 1927. However, as described in the previous chapter, by the late 1950s, the Mexican government was already pushing in a new direction: to develop the tourism economy across the country. These plans included the Los Cabos (San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas) region of Baja California Sur. The southern part of the peninsula was an attractive location for tourism development because: 1) it already appealed to Americans and other foreign travelers; and 2) it was so close to the US/California border.<sup>16</sup>

Here's how Niemann begins his story about the development of Los Cabos:

Until a handful of visionary pioneers a half-century ago decided to invest in resorts near the tip of the Baja California peninsula, there had been little going on in the area since the Indians rebelled against the padres and the English and Dutch pirates way-laid Spanish Galleons.

In fact, by 1950 Cabo San Lucas only had a population of 548, mostly fishermen and cannery workers. Even then the much larger town of San Jose del Cabo boasted fewer than 2,000 inhabitants.

The combined Los Cabos area today is a world-class resort area, thanks to just a handful of visionary men. Four of the most significant are Abelardo "Rod" Rodriguez Jr., William "Bud" Parr, Luis Coppola Bonillas, and Luis Bulnes. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, these men began buying land from small ranches. Among them, the four men, either independently or as partners, would build seven hotels or resorts: Los Arcos in La Paz, Club Rancho Las Cruces on the gulf east of La Paz, and farther south, the hotels Palmilla, Cabo San Lucas, Hacienda, and the Solmar [Niemann 2002:230].

Neimann's account of Los Cabos history borders on near complete glorification of the men who turned Los Cabos from fishing village to international destination, but it does provide a glimpse into why the East Cape may have been overlooked. The influence of a group of men with direct connections to a former Mexican president was no minor factor. According to James, the Mexican government originally wanted to focus development on the East Cape, instead of either Cabo San Lucas or San Jose del Cabo.

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<sup>16</sup> Despite some of the narratives about the lack of value of BCS, the region clearly did have value for various outside groups for quite some time. Part of the value and draw of BCS in the early years was its proximity to the US-Mexico border. But, unlike other tourism destinations such as Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco on Mexico's Pacific coast, access to BCS was difficult. The first tourists and fishermen who started traveling to the East Cape and Cabo San Lucas in the 1950s did so only because they had access to small, private planes that could land on dirt air strips.

The El Rincon/Punta Arena area was where this development was supposed to happen.<sup>17</sup> But those plans fell through, James told me, because of money, social connections, and the “business interests of people who owned land in San Jose del Cabo.” All of that economic and political attention lavished on Los Cabos left the East Cape in the dust, literally: many of the roads are still unpaved. It remained hidden, unknown, and relatively disconnected. Regardless of the reasons, it was a near miss in the history of development for the East Cape.

Ironically, it was the eventual “overdevelopment” of the Los Cabos corridor that finally put the East Cape in the spotlight as a more isolated, private, and remote alternative. The Los Cabos of today—with its Hard Rock Café, Costco, and Home Depot—is “successful” in many economic and political senses, but it’s also crowded, paved, full of tourists, and plagued by dramatic economic inequality (see Wilson 2008; Lopez et al.. 2006). It’s not the cozy little seaside “escape” it once was. Development, for many expats and travelers, has ruined Los Cabos and pushed them to new ground.

Cabo San Lucas used to be the kind of place where many American tourists went to get away from development (Benner 1988). Up until the early 1970s, it was just another out of the way “sleepy fishing village” that attracted surfers, anglers, and other hardy travelers who made their way down the peninsula via small planes or four wheel drive vehicles. Keep in mind that framing this part of Baja as a “sleepy” village along the coast is one way in which outsiders constructed this place. It is part of the romantic, exotic story that expats and others tell themselves about the East Cape. Travelers—many of them Americans—were drawn to the tip of the Baja peninsula because it felt remote, yet was relatively close geographically. But it was just far enough away and difficult to get to that it remained relatively unknown for decades. As described below, when the Trans-peninsular highway was completed in 1973, things started to change.

Dave and Ann first flew down to the tip of Baja in the late 1970s. Back in those days, they told me, the airport was tiny; there was just a little palapa there to greet incoming tourists. They stayed at Finistera, one of only four hotels in Cabo San Lucas at the time. When they first arrived, the customs agent told them they’d found “the new big spot.” Dave and Ann loved Cabo San Lucas so much they returned again and again each

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<sup>17</sup> The El Rincon/Punta Arena area is the same place where Cabo Cortés was proposed to be built.

year. “There was only a little two-lane road,” Ann told me. “It was just a small fishing village.” Cabo San Lucas used to look a lot like the East Cape does today, they both explained. “It was very different back then,” Ann added. “But today,” Dave told me, “it’s a zoo.” He continues, talking about the lack of planning and infrastructure. “San Jose is better, but they also have problems with sewage.” Ann jumps in and says that Cabo San Lucas was allowed to “run wild.” This is why they left Los Cabos and sought out a new place. They eventually found their way to the pueblo of La Ribera, on the East Cape. Dave explains: “We came here because we liked the Mexicans, and we liked the small fishing village. And that’s the way this place remained—a small fishing village.” Dave and Ann found La Ribera in 1987, and continue to live there to this day.

Dave and Ann’s story is representative of a wider pattern among the expats on the East Cape. Many found Cabo San Lucas early on and were attracted to life in a small Mexican community. But as the Los Cabos tourism zone grew, the attraction faded. Betty, another expat resident of La Ribera, had a similar experience to that of Dave and Ann. She first rented a timeshare in Los Cabos. But she eventually decided she didn’t want to live there because “there were too many people in San Lucas; it was too touristy.” Betty told me she wanted to experience a small Mexican town where she could afford to live close to the beach. “I also wanted a place that wasn’t so gringo-ized,” she explained.

But there’s another side to this story. As more people come to places like Cabo Pulmo, and the cost of living rises along with land values, many residents, especially those with families, can no longer afford to stay. Pedro, who works at one of the four main restaurants in Cabo Pulmo, is a case in point. He is 32 years old. He married into the Castro family and moved down to Cabo Pulmo about 10 years ago to live and work. He and his wife have two children. Today Pedro spends most of his time working in the family restaurant, but he has also spent several years working with park officials to help support and protect the Cabo Pulmo National Park.

When he first arrived in Cabo Pulmo in 2002, he knew very little about it. Back in those days, he explained, few people throughout Mexico knew much about Cabo Pulmo. The place itself was sparsely populated, he explains: “There was nothing here. Just beautiful beaches and *puro monte* (pure wilderness, in the undeveloped sense).”



“It was all free. There were no fences in those days,” he tells me. He mentions the lack of fences several times. Pedro says that the fences were put up about six or seven years before (this would have been 2005-2006). The fences, as I explain in following chapters, were a repercussion of intense social conflicts over land ownership. Pedro recounts the moment when these struggles peaked: “They put up aggressive signs telling people to keep out. There were many signs, all the way along the road to Cabo Pulmo.”

These land wars were sparked, in large part, because of real estate speculation and dramatically rising land values. The enclosure of space is one of the aftereffects of the tourism development process. The speculation in and around Cabo Pulmo was connected to the potential development at Cabo Cortés and Cabo Riviera. Pedro says that those projects were too big and ambitious, and were problematic because they threatened Pulmo’s national park. But Pedro makes it clear that he’s not against development: “Nobody is against development. Obviously, it creates jobs and all of that. But don’t turn this place into Cabo San Lucas.” He tells me that Cabo San Lucas is full of diesel, gasoline, and oil. “The water [in Cabo] is black,” he says.

I ask Pedro about his future in Cabo Pulmo. Does he want to stay here? He answers without a pause: he isn’t going to stay. “It’s beautiful,” he tells me, “it’s safe for my kids and very peaceful...extremely peaceful.” He continues:

But for me, as someone who is not part of the family and doesn’t have any right to the land, there’s no place for me and my family. I can’t build anything. I can’t do anything. For obvious reasons—my kids are growing up—I have to leave Cabo Pulmo. I don’t want to leave, but I have to. I have to look at my kids’ future, their education, how they’re growing up and all that. Because here...they don’t allow anything. If things were more amenable to one’s needs, if one could build, if I could do all the things I am talking about. I would love to stay. The truth is I would love to stay here. If there was electricity and all that. Because it’s a battle—it’s an incredible battle. Especially with water, it’s always a battle—even more with a business. It’s always a worry—that the water will run out, that we need to secure water.

He tells me again that he wishes he could stay. But there are no schools. He would stay if Cabo Pulmo had the kinds of things he needed for a family. But these things don’t exist here:

So we have to go somewhere else. And we’re one of the few young married couples that have not left. But we’re just about at that point. Maybe another year. And then I think my kids will go to La Paz with my wife. I’ll stay here and keep

working in the restaurant. This is our plan for the future. But I don't know what will happen.

Pedro's story is one part of the cycle of discovery, development, immigration and out-migration that is happening to "new" destinations like Cabo Pulmo all around the world. Butler (1980) and Cohen (1977) outlined this pattern decades ago. It's a story that Alexander Garland told in his 1996 fictional novel *The Beach*, in which hip, "adventurous" travelers seek out remote, hidden places, only to escape once they are discovered and "spoiled" by others. More adventurous travelers find the new destinations, and eventually all the developers, realtors, investors, hoteliers, and tourists follow in their footsteps.

Dave and Ann, along with Betty, are part of a more recent wave of expats who have followed in the footsteps of earlier waves who first arrived in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Each step in the life cycle of a destination comes from new waves of visitors, who seek out increasingly more services and amenities. However, once a destination reaches a certain point of saturation, some people leave, seeking out another place that's more "off the grid," isolated, empty, and undeveloped. But, as Pedro's story illustrates, it's not just the expats who leave. More importantly, Pedro and his family aren't leaving by choice. They have to leave because they feel there is no future for them in Cabo Pulmo. There is no way for them to move forward; they cannot survive in a place where access to land is impossible, and basic social infrastructure is non-existent.

This pattern of tourism development takes on a sort of hop-scotch pattern, since places can only be isolated, new, or unknown for so long. This creates a situation in which there is always a search for new destinations, places, and "authentic" experiences. As Harvey (2010) puts it, rather than actually solving problems, capitalism tends to just move them around geographically.

This is precisely what's happening on the East Cape today: the overdevelopment, saturation, and crowding of the Los Cabos zone has resulted in more and more people finding their way to the other, less developed, side of the cape. This flood of new people—and interest in the economic potential of the region—led directly to the social conflicts over control of the land—and the meaning of the place. The arrival of new people—and more importantly very particular ways of thinking about money, land, and people—resulted in a radical repositioning of the East Cape's place in the "organizational

web” that Logan and Molotch describe (1987:43). This is part of the broader conceptual shift in value along the lines of what Elyachar discusses. In this case, the East Cape has moved from a peripheral, almost forgotten location to a central place within the wider real estate and tourism markets. The value of the land increased because of this *connection*.

Ironically, it was just at this time of *connection* via new arriving tourists that the East Cape came to be valued precisely because it was perceived as being *disconnected* from places like Cabo San Lucas. So the new, high value of the East Cape is a matter of connection and disconnection all at the same time. Some of this seems a bit counterintuitive. It’s precisely the disconnection of the East Cape—it’s remoteness, the fact that it was unknown—that made it relatively worthless for the global market (excepting brief periods of integration). But that very disconnection is what suddenly made it valuable in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (for some people) when places like Cancún and Los Cabos started losing their attraction for *some residents and travelers*.

Remoteness—or the idea of it—is what drew people in to the East Cape. At the same time, those changes led to other disconnections, or, to put it in Elyachar (and Marx’s) terms, dispossessions. The story of Pedro and his family is a case in point. The expanding tourism market attracts some new residents, while dispossessing or dispelling others. Pedro and his family have been dispossessed of any hope of an actual future in Cabo Pulmo. It’s all part of the commoditization of place, as the East Cape transforms into an attractive, marketable destination for tourists, retirees, and others. In order for that to be possible, the land itself had to be turned into individualized, legally-sanctioned, saleable pieces. This process of formalization, which resulted in the legitimization of some residents and the exclusion of others, began in the early 1970s, in the form of land surveys, maps, and title documents. Mapping is a fundamental component of drawing a place into the market economy. Of making places comparable and commensurable.

### **Value, grounded: mapping and formalizing the East Cape**

Today, land in and around Cabo Pulmo is fenced, divided, and (relatively) accurately mapped. In decades past, land tenure and ownership was more informal, irregular, and open. As local realtor Paul Clark told me, property boundaries in the earlier

days were based “cactus to cactus” or “hill to hill” survey methods. While such methods might be considered less accurate when compared with contemporary GPS mapping capabilities, keep in mind that those informal methods also held tremendous meaning and social memory for local residents. For as much as the process of mapping is about creating accurate information, it can also mean the loss or occlusion of other meanings, claims, and histories.

Back in the days before the parcels were mapped, the borders between neighboring parcels were highly fluid. As Weiant (2005:159) explains:

Until 1970s, the land of Cabo Pulmo was used and treated as communally owned for the most part. Families occupied small houses and would graze cattle and horses collectively in the flats and hills, with little recognition of the land boundaries. Over time, the communal use of land plus the giving, trading, selling, and re-selling created a very complex mosaic of formal and nonformal land ownership.

In 1969, the creation of the “Nuevo San Juan of 1970” subdivision plan was the first salvo in eradicating those communal ownership patterns, and an early step toward privatization and the creation of a formal, legal real estate market. The goal of this plan was to clearly delineate and define property ownership in the region. From Los Frailes point to El Rincon, property owners were called upon to make their parcel claims—how much property they owned and for how long (Weiant 2005:159). Parcels of approximately 0.5 hectares were also given to households with no documented land ownership—as a “right of possession” (Weiant 2005:159). Each of the new parcels was assigned a number. These numbers, representative of the formal, legal, and official division of the landscape, replace earlier forms of categorization and land use.

Previous ownership and tenure patterns were shaped by the histories, social agreements, decisions, memories, and daily routines of the people who lived there. It was never a blank slate, of course. Long before any European American set foot on the cape, people lived there for thousands of years. These were the Guaycura and the Pericú. The modern era of ownership and tenure began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Mexican President Benito Juarez granted two *predios* to the earliest settlers (Las Lagunas and Nuevo San Juan). These *predios* were large tracts of land that stretched from Punta Arena south to Los Frailes point.

That was the beginning of ownership founded upon government sanctioned maps and titles. But the maps themselves were undoubtedly inaccurate, based as they were on 19<sup>th</sup> century survey methods. In the ensuing years, the internal and external boundaries of those first maps were increasingly blurred as land was traded, sold, and gifted among residents and new arrivals. By the time 1969 rolled around, the landscape had become the “complex mosaic” that Weiant describes.

This pattern of disorder was common throughout the peninsula. After Independence in 1821, the Mexican government was “swept up in the nineteenth-century rage for progress and actively encouraged colonization of its uninhabited territories” (Berger 1998:26). In 1863, under the reign of Benito Juarez, the government passed a law, patterned after the American Homestead Act, which granted large tracts of land to colonizers (more than forty times the 160 acres granted by its American equivalent). Even more laws, passed by the Diaz regime in 1883, expanded this colonization effort. The grants themselves were called *colonias*, and they came with stipulations about the minimum population size expected for each square kilometer per decade (Berger 1998:26). But there was no oversight, and those rules were “flagrantly ignored” (Berger 1998:26). The government didn’t even have the financial resources to fund proper surveys. As Berger explains,

The result of so many reckless laws in a land of impressionist maps and absentee supervision was, predictably, a bureaucratic free-for-all. Grants were extended on the whim of the nearest minor official, leaving the grantee free to draw his own lines. Titles were conferred, canceled, redrawn, accepted by local authorities and voided in La Paz, or accepted in La Paz and rescinded in Mexico City [1998:26].

The subdivision Nuevo San Juan on the East Cape was part of a wider effort to impose order upon the perceived disordered peninsular landscape. Social conflict over the new boundaries and government backed titles was one all too common result. This includes the East Cape, where conflicts over land and title have raged throughout the region. The land conflicts in Cabo Pulmo being a case in point. One of the primary families that lays claim to Cabo Pulmo today was, according to one informant, explicitly excluded from the formal title process that took place in 1970. This family continues to exert their claim to the land, based upon their histories, narratives, memories, and experiences with the land. Those narratives run up against the official, purportedly legal, mapped boundaries of the landscape that date back to the 1970 subdivision—and the

stories and claims of other residents (Mexican and non-Mexican). In fact, there are several pieces of property that are caught up in battles between local families and others who claim ownership. One, known as “Lot 14,” has had as many as five different individuals and/or groups trying to establish legal ownership (Weiant 2005:159). Although the 1970 titling process was meant to create order, in many ways the final result has been the exact opposite. Perhaps this is the fallout of the formalization process.

A formal real estate market requires exact boundaries—or the most exact boundaries that are possible in a given time. There have been various waves of surveys over the last century or so that have been used to map, define, and redefine the landscape. Each successive wave is more accurate in the geographic sense, but not necessarily in the social sense. Over time, boundaries that were once maintained by memory and practice were replaced with government backed maps, boundaries, and titles. In a sense, technology replaced human experience, memory, meaning, and practice. While the technical accuracy of those maps increased along with innovations in mapping practices and equipment, recurrent disputes and inconsistencies point to an undeniable inaccuracy in a social/historical sense.

For example, East Cape realtor Paul Clark told me about the occurrence of something called a “*demasia*.” When land was re-surveyed in times past, there were instances in which the surveys found “extra” land due to the mistakes or inaccuracies of earlier surveys. Those *demasias* were often claimed by the surveyors themselves. In another more recent case, two residents of Cabo Pulmo became entangled in a battle of inches over the boundaries of their property. The earliest surveys of Cabo Pulmo, apparently, were flawed. Maps were made according to those flawed surveys, and land was sold based upon those maps. Years later, the developer of the land informed these two residents that their property lines were actually 18 inches off. This statement was based upon more recent surveys. While this seems like a minor issue, the residents were both upset and concerned because that 18 inch shift may have given the developer enough room to make changes to the development plan that they did not want to see happen. The residents argued their case based upon the property boundaries they have lived with and known in practice for more than a decade; the developer’s case was based solely upon the results of an official survey.

These are both examples of how mapping technologies—especially those sanctioned by official, government entities—come to dominate the landscape. More often than not, the claims based upon official maps win the day, while claims based upon history, narratives, and memories are either dismissed, ignored, or simply forgotten. But they are not forgotten by everyone: many of the land disputes that took place between 2007 and 2012 included various elements of this battle between people with legal ownership and others who claimed ownership based upon historical ties, tenure, memory, or current residency.

All of this represents a tension between shifting, competing value systems. On the one hand, there's a valuation process based upon the experiences, exchanges, and memories of the people who lived on the land after the original 19<sup>th</sup> century land grants. This is value in the plural sense that Graeber discusses (2005, 2013). These are the unique, incomparable meanings of a place. Much of the value of a place comes from those experiences and memories: which places have water, which ones have good views, which ones were a home site, had good fishing sites, access to resources, and so on. On the other hand we have the valuation that's based upon a "precise" delineation of a specific piece of geographic space, in relation to a wider market. This is value within a commoditized economic system. Unlike parcels of land measured and separated according to a more open, social "cactus to cactus" system, the officially mapped parcels can be ranked, ordered, and compared with *other pieces of land* that exist within the global real estate market system. For a system founded upon economic value, measurability and comparability are absolutely crucial.

In this way, places formerly inscribed with social meanings and memories are stripped of social context, turning them into alienable commodities that can be exchanged in an open market via a global market system. But this stripping of context is obviously not complete, since the places' social contexts remain for those people who have long occupied the region. Yet, from the outside, those social meanings are glossed over, lost, erased. History and social meaning are lost to technology and government-backed systems of measurement, valuation, and ordering. Value is no longer a matter of who and when, but instead how much and where. It becomes impersonal.

One of the means for assessing value in the contemporary global real estate market system is, of course, money. Places can still be compared by their attributes—proximity to the ocean, square footage, ease of access, views, resources, etc. But they can also easily be measured, compared, and contrasted by how much money they can be exchanged for. Much like the commodity fetish that Marx describes, this is a situation in which it can be easy to conflate the monetary value of a place with its value. In this sense money serves as a mask that covers up all other potential forms of value. And when some people have more money than others, this seemingly simple transition from informal, heterogeneous values to a money values means, in the end, that some people will have access and many others will not. Dispossession occurs, in this case, when rising land values, due to connection with wider comparative markets, mean that some people can no longer afford to live in a particular place. This is exactly what has happened all throughout the cape region of Baja in the past two decades.

This value shift—from the plurality of values to the singularity of money—did not happen overnight. As with the rise and fall of the pearl economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the current value shift that is underway on the East Cape is part of broader, dynamic historical processes. However, these processes are never completely definitive or hegemonic. They are imperfect, subject to ebbs and flows, and never guaranteed to come to fruition. Despite the mapping and formalization of land ownership of the Cabo Pulmo region, which was one step toward the value system of the international real estate market, the area still remained in a state of relative disconnection for decades. This was partly a matter of good old geographic isolation...and bad roads.

### **The road**

After about an hour we made it from San Jose del Cabo to the heart of the East Cape. The road was unpaved—bumpy, dusty, and slow going. We were driving in an old Ford Econoline with a leaking engine, terrible brakes, no registration, no lights, and wobbly steering. Not exactly the paragon of off-road Baja vehicles, but it got us there. We were on our way to surf at a place called “Punta Escondido,”<sup>18</sup> known for its good waves and uncrowded waters that are protected by an entrance blocked by a small, gated

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<sup>18</sup> Not the real name of this place.



expat community. Technically it's not legal to block access to the coast, but it happens and nobody does anything about it. Our access was secured because we happened to know one of the people who owned property there. He told us he'd leave the gate open and we could drive right in. If anyone asked, he said, just tell them we were his guests. The gate was open, and we made it down to the beach without any problems. The waves looked pretty good, so we started getting ready to head out into the water. We stayed out for an hour or so.

When I got out, I started talking to a few of the guys down on the beach, who were sitting under a makeshift *palapa*. They were some of the local property owners. I told them about our friend who owned land there, and there was some grumbling about some people who invite too many people. But everything seemed ok. In the course of conversation, one of the guys mentioned that he was from Encinitas, California. I was surprised, since I grew up in the coastal community of Carlsbad, which is just north of Encinitas. By chance, I asked him if he happened to know Mike,<sup>19</sup> a surfboard shaper I used to know who lived in Encinitas as well. "Ya, he lives in that house right there," he said as he pointed down the beach. "I think he's home right now." An amazing coincidence, I thought to myself.

I went down the beach and up the pathway to Mike's house. I was thinking there was no way this is the same person. I rang the bell on the gate. A man in his late 50s came ambling out of the door, and I recognized him immediately. It took him a minute, but he recognized me too. I hadn't seen him in more than 10 years. The first words out of his mouth: "How did you get in here?" He wanted to know how I'd found him way down there in Baja. That wasn't exactly the reception I expected. However, I learned that many of the people who live out here on the East Cape aren't here to be found. And the last thing they want is more people wandering down that coastal road and intruding upon their isolated (for now) little paradise in the desert.

Joseph Wood Krutch begins his book about Baja, titled *The Forgotten Peninsula*, with ruminations about the meaning and effects of roads. Bad roads, to be more precise. His first chapter starts with a story about getting stuck in the middle of the Sonoran Desert. Krutch explains that he would have been worried or stressed out, but he was

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudonym.

instead “in that high state of elation which is sometimes (but not always) produced when one has got somewhere one has long wanted to be” (1986:4-5). His book, he tells us, is about his adventures in a remote place with “four centuries of stubborn resistance to everything called Progress” (1986:6). It’s a place to which he returned “again and again to poke his nose into some remote areas still seldom visited, and also to taste the pleasures of others less accessible” (1986:6). Quoting some of the early missionary fathers, who referred to the peninsula as one of the most unfortunate, miserable places in the world, Krutch tells us that the once worthless landscape has taken on new meaning: “To modern travelers this place is awesome rather than merely repellant” (1986:7). He tells us about places where life isn’t quite so bleak—places like La Paz and Cabo San Lucas, where outsiders can find some of the comforts of home.

Figure 2.1. Map from 1898 showing route from San Jose del Cabo to La Paz.

But those places, Krutch says, are exceptions in a place that was—at the time—still very isolated. His book was published in 1961, remember, when Cabo San Lucas was just beginning its transformation from fishing village to tourism destination. Krutch refers to La Paz and Cabo as mere “appendages” of the United States and/or Mainland Mexico, not truly part of the “still wild peninsula” (1986:9-10). His story of isolation and disconnection hinges upon access:

Not until that possibly still rather distant time when a real road is built will its now marred beauty be successfully exploited and the coast turned into that string of California-style beach resorts that will be its ultimate fate (1986:10).

It all comes down to the road. But this change will take a long time, Krutch assures us, because all previous attempts to develop the peninsula “have ended in dismal failure, for the land has always returned to its own wild self—as though it had merely shaken off the annoyance of conquistador and priest, land promoter and engineer” (1986:10). Baja, for Krutch, is a place “where time has stood still” (1986:14).

Krutch closes his first chapter by describing Baja as an “out of this world” place, one whose “charms” come from its longstanding isolation and remoteness. Remoteness, I should add, in relation to *certain* ways of life. Decoded further: Baja was alluring, meaningful, and valuable for many western travelers (and readers) because it represented something long lost, forgotten, or destroyed. The peninsula managed to remain in this state, in part, because there was no way to get there. No roads.

But the “real road” that Krutch lamented, the one that he predicted would result in a coastline jammed with California-style resorts, did eventually come. Twelve years after the publication of *The Forgotten Peninsula*, on December 1, 1973, the Transpeninsular Highway was officially opened. The number of travelers who made their way down the peninsula exploded. The once inaccessible became, at long last, open. Accessibility increased even more in the late 1970s with the creation of the international airport in Los Cabos. But this opening of Baja was extremely uneven. Many places remained cut off, relatively unknown by, and isolated from, outsiders,. While the western side of the cape grew at an increasingly rapid rate from the 1970s onward, the eastern side saw little change. New people found their way there, but not many. All because of those bad roads.

There’s a map from 1898 in the Pablo L. Martínez Archives in La Paz, BCS (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2). It’s a loose, hand-drawn map, showing the route that led from San

Jose del Cabo to La Paz. The road heads north out of San Jose del Cabo, passes by the pueblos of Miraflores and Santiago, then Los Barriles, on its way to the city of La Paz. The route heads in a northerly direction, cutting across the rounded heart of the cape itself. To the east, a large chunk of the landscape is cast aside, leftover, discarded, outside of the dominant flow of social life. That swath of land is the East Cape.

During the missionary period, there were four missions founded in the cape region: one in Todos Santos, another in San Jose del Cabo, one in Santiago, and another in La Paz. The old route, shown in the map, connected those beacons of western ideas, practices, and ways of life. Today, the paved road from San Jose del Cabo follows a similar inland path. Highway One, which is paved, leaves San Jose, passes through Mira Flores and Santiago, then forks at a small place called “Las Cuevas.” Here you can continue north to Los Barriles, on the way to La Paz, or you can make a right turn and head toward the East Cape via the town of La Ribera.



Figure 2.2: Detail based upon 1898 map showing the route from San Jose del Cabo to Buena Vista. The map highlights how the East Cape, which starts just north of San Jose del Cabo and extends up to present day Los Barriles (near “Buena Vista” on this map), was already isolated from the primary routes of economic and social traffic in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most direct connections to Cabo Pulmo, according to some informants, was actually Miraflores, which residents were able to reach by crossing a small mountain pass.

The main roads in Los Barriles and La Ribera are paved, but most of the side streets are not. This creates a dusty existence, but both towns bustle with residents and

activity. South of La Ribera, just past Punta Arena, the paved road stops. Cabo Pulmo is about another 10km down the road. If the road is in good shape, it's another 15 minutes or so of driving. If the weather is bad, it'll take longer. If it's really bad, you're going to have to wait. The same can be said of the rest of the unpaved East Cape coast road. From Cabo Pulmo, it's another two plus hours of jittery driving until you reach the frayed edges of urban San Jose del Cabo and, at long last, the smoothness of asphalt.

It's that arc of unpaved road that keeps all the people out of the East Cape. Or at least, many people. This is a common sentiment throughout the region. The roads may be brutal and difficult, and they may beat the hell out of all vehicles, but they also keep the place from turning into the next Cabo San Lucas: the roads are a protective barrier against unwanted change. They do keep certain people out. Once, while talking to some expats sitting at a bar in a burger joint in Los Barriles, I mentioned that I was staying in Cabo Pulmo. One man said to me "Cabo Pulmo is great. Except for that unpaved road. Once it's paved it will be much better." Another expat, also in Los Barriles asked me, "Cabo Pulmo? Why would you go all the way down there? Especially with that road!" These sentiments about Cabo Pulmo and other parts of the more isolated cape are not uncommon in places like Los Barriles, where there are banks, bars, grocery stores and enough conveniences to keep the 5,000 or so residents happy. Only some people are drawn deeper into the East Cape, and that's why it has remained relatively sparsely populated up until the present day.

Still, it's not as if the East Cape is *terra incognita*. In fact, as Neiman (2002) and Mayo (2002) tell the story, Americans and other expats were heading down there by at least the early 1950s. But many of them took an alternative route to get around those bad roads: they flew. This led to its exclusive character, since not everyone had the ability to fly or charter a small plane to get to these remote places. Rancho Buena Vista is the oldest fishing resort in Baja. It was built back in 1952 by Herb Tansey, a former TWA pilot. There were only a few options for getting there in those days: "Many guests flew private planes into the excellent 2,500-foot-long dirt strip less than a quarter mile away from the main ranch. Others arrived by either a three-hour taxi ride or a 20-minute charter plane ride from La Paz (75 miles)" (Niemannn 2002:225).

But the road was even slower south of Rancho Buena Vista and Los Barriles. In 1966, two retired Americans named Pel and Peg Carter made their way down to the cape in an eight cylinder Ford truck equipped with a cab-over camper and “all the conveniences except shower and toilet” (1967:168). This was their second trip deep down into Baja California. From La Paz, they drove south to Rancho Buena Vista, averaging about seven to eight miles per hour. They reminisced about the route: “The roads were just as rough, rocky, steep and full of holes as we had remembered them” (1967:174). From Rancho Buena Vista they headed ten miles south to the fishing resort/hotel at Punta Colorada, located south of the pueblo of La Ribera. They asked Bobby Van Wormer, the owner of the hotel, if he knew of a good place with a calm bay for fishing. Van Wormer pointed them to Cabo Pulmo, only 12 miles south. The road was slow and rough. It took the Carters almost two hours to make that trip—six miles an hour.

More than two decades later, Sally and Wilkie were introduced to the beauty and isolation of Cabo Pulmo by taking the route. They may have been able to travel faster than the Carters, thanks to improved road conditions, but the experience of isolation—and adventure—was similar. Sally and Wilkie’s first trip to Cabo Pulmo was in 1995, when they were in their late 40s. They had heard about the small coastal through their employer, who owned a small house down there, and decided to go down for a visit. Sally tells a story about that first, trip, which focuses on the unreliable car they borrowed to traverse the road to Pulmo:

Our friend said the car [he was letting us borrow] was not running well. He picked us up from the airport and said “I’m quite sure you’ll make it to Cabo Pulmo, but don’t drive after dark, and if something should happen and the car breaks down, don’t leave the car!” [she laughs]. So we’re driving along—and first we stopped at the store and I was just totally overwhelmed speaking no Spanish and shopping and getting what we needed because we wanted to shop for our whole time here since we weren’t coming back into town. So by the time we got that done, we [were] driving after dark. But we thought we would see how far we could go. So as it turned out we got just about half of a mile down the dirt [road] and the car went [she makes the sound of a car dying]. Everything shut off.”

Sally says they looked around and saw how dark it was. They had no idea where they were. It was so quiet, so dark. They felt like they were in the middle of nowhere. Some people stopped and offered to help. One young woman who was with her

grandmother agreed to give Sally a ride to Cabo Pulmo, which is where they would meet with their contact person. Wilkie stayed back with the car.

Sally finally arrived in Cabo Pulmo around 10:00 that evening. There was one light in Cabo Pulmo and she thought to herself, “Good grief, where am I?” It took some time for their contacts in Pulmo to arrange for help—they had to find a tow rope and then drive back out to where Sally and Wilkie’s car had died. By 11:00 that night, both of them made it to Cabo Pulmo, with their dead vehicle in tow. At that point that had not even seen Cabo Pulmo and had no clue what it was or what it looked like. But, as she explains, “The next morning, when we woke up and I saw where I was—I was just like ‘this is it,’ somehow [I knew] I’d made it to paradise.”

It was paradise because it was so far away from the world of traffic and light pollution and noise. Both Sally and Wilkie remarked that Cabo Pulmo’s “tranquility” and peacefulness were a big part of the draw. As was the darkness—the lack of city lights...or hardly any lights at all, for that matter. As Sally explained to me, it all “seemed really wild—but it was such a wonderful thing to be able to have that—for us to be able to afford a piece of property that was this close to the ocean, and also had these mountains. It was paradise—my concept of paradise. It was beyond my wildest dreams.”

Cabo Pulmo attracts certain kinds of people, and the road plays a role in this. Sally told me another story about a conversation she had with a female tourist in Cabo Pulmo. This woman was apparently not enjoying the remoteness (and lack of services) that are part of the Cabo Pulmo experience. She asked Sally how long she was planning on staying in Cabo Pulmo. Sally responded, “Well, we live here—this is where we live in the winter.” But the woman said, “no, I mean here,” emphasizing that last word. “You mean Cabo Pulmo,” Sally asked? The woman said, “Yes, we’re going to stay here a couple of nights.” Sally once again answered, “I live here,” and the woman was completely blown away by this: “You live here in Cabo Pulmo? People live here? They actually live here? There’s no electricity—how do you live here?” Sally laughs, finishing up her story, saying once again that the woman was “totally blown away” and could not understand how people would live in such a situation or place *by choice*.

Sally, Wilkie and I all talked about this—how Cabo Pulmo attracts and draws in people who are looking for a certain kind of experience. They want the isolation, the

different way of life, the connection with a certain quality of life that they feel is missing from their daily lives:

And that's why we have to save places like this. Or there will be no places. It's the same thing as wilderness and...how well you make your trails—so that everybody can get there? You know? Do you build a road into everything so that it's accessible for everybody? Or do you keep some places that are hard to get to?

I know that road well. The road that the Carters traveled in the late 1960s and Sally and Wilkie battled got stranded on in the mid 1990s. Today, the road is still unpaved most of the way, but it certainly doesn't take as long to travel to Cabo Pulmo as it did in the 1960s. These days it takes about 15 minutes to make the drive from Punta Colorado to Cabo Pulmo that Pel and Peg Carter documented in their book. Of course, it can take longer, but the road is far better than it was back in the mid-1960s. It's no surprise that so many people who travel to the East Cape chose to go by plane back in those days. It's also no surprise, considering those roads, that so few made it all the way to Pulmo. Starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, traffic into the heart of the unpaved East Cape did increase. In Cabo Pulmo, that was when the first waves of Americans started to arrive—they were the seedlings of the expat community that eventually formed in the early 1990s (of which Sally and Wilkie were a part)

Much of my discussion about roads and access, up until this point, comes from the perspective of outsiders—the expats and travelers who sought the East Cape for one reason or another. But there are (at least) two sides of the story when it comes to the meaning of the road. Angeles grew up in Cabo Pulmo in the 1970s and 1980s. She runs a restaurant in the community, which means that her livelihood depends on the tourists and expats who come to Cabo Pulmo. Tourism brings in money. She does not deny this. But her views about markets, change and growth are complex, mixed, and ambivalent.

Angeles remembers the early days of Cabo Pulmo, when few people even had cars, so they often had to hitch rides. We talked about what it meant to live in a small, isolated community: “Well, in those days, despite the fact that people were dedicated to ranching and fishing, there was a lot of poverty,” she explained. There weren't jobs and the fishermen and ranchers often lacked markets to sell their products, she explained. Her father, she recounted, sometimes had to travel as far as Magdalena Bay for work. Angeles



also talks about the hardships of the poor roads. I ask if she would like to see a paved road. She answers,

Well, I have conflicted thoughts about this. I'd want pavement so that our cars would last a lot longer, but I think this would bring all types of people—not good people. So, it would be a lot easier for many people to come and commit crimes in the night, and our peace will be gone, our tranquility. We have already experienced this in the summers, even with the bad roads—people come and do scandalous things on our beaches. This has happened a few times—it's not very often. So, if the road was paved, it would be easier for those kinds of people to get here. To come to Cabo Pulmo for a joyride. So, on that side of things, I don't want this ... Maybe I'd prefer no paved road at all.

Concerns about what will come along with a new road are common. Daniel is a fisherman who has been living and working in Cabo Pulmo since 1996. He married into one of the three main families in the pueblo. When I asked how things are with the community of Cabo Pulmo, he calmly said “We're fine. We have no road or power, but we're used to this.” Later we talk about the kind of development he would like to see in his community, and his answer is less reserved, more candid: “The Mexicans here, we're fucked because there's no power. We also need to put in a road. But that could bring in more people who could rob and steal from us.”

Roads bring many things with them—and ambivalence is one of them. Both Angeles and Daniel's views about a new road in Cabo Pulmo are conflicted. Roads bring new markets, services, and opportunities, but they also bring a lot of unknowns. Many of the Mexican residents of Cabo Pulmo talk about their desire for health services, schools, and improved infrastructure (water and power mostly). They know these are the kinds of things that come with new development, new roads. But there is also a strong discomfort—even fear—of what else will come with those roads. People talk about the crime that will come with a new (unknown) workforce, about drugs, narcos, and pollution. The road can bring so many things—but the lack of a road is a sort of protective barrier against an unknown future.

The expat residents also express concerns about the kinds of changes that will come with a new road. Bud and Mary have been going to Cabo Pulmo since 1982, when they first drove down in a “Subaru station wagon with two kids, a windsurfer on top, and seats packed with diapers underneath.” Both of them talk about the days when the roads were even rougher, and when Cabo Pulmo was even smaller. When I asked them about

what caused the rising land values, Mary told me it was “Because they expected this place to explode. The road was going to be paved any minute--that's what they've been telling us for 30 years. Any minute that road is gonna be paved.” It never happened. Not yet. But it’s out there. Mary and Bud both said they worry about what will come with that road, what kind of “riffraff” it will bring.

Local realtor Paul Clark told me thinks there will be dramatic changes when the paved road comes:

If and when the pavement comes, that will mean big resorts, property values will go up, we’ll probably make lots of money, but we’ll probably only last a few more years and then leave and find another place. Or—we don’t know. But it will be very dramatic. The only reason the road didn’t get paved is because of the economic downturn.

The plans are in place, he told me, but not the money. Earlier in the interview, he talked about the different waves of people who’d come to the East Cape. When he first arrived in the early 1980s, he could name all the people who lived for miles around, and only three or four of them were “gringos”. Those early waves of people were more adventurous, and subsequent waves were more and more conservative, demanding increasingly more services. Different waves, different values. “The next wave,” he told me, “will be the pavement wave.”

### **Walking on money**

It’s mid-day in Cabo Pulmo. October, 2012. The heat is well on its way. I just finished a late breakfast at a small local restaurant called “El Caballero.” Juevos rancheros, juice, coffee, beans. I’m talking with Lorenzo, who has lived in Cabo Pulmo for more than a decade. He tells me more about the story of Meri Montaña, as he heard it from one of the primary founding members of the community: Jesus Castro Fiol. According to Jesus, Lorenzo tells me, Meri had a massive amount of land, many heads of cattle and lots of money. Meri adopted Jesus, he says, and eventually gave him everything when she died. This story—about Meri giving all of her land to Jesus Castro Fiol—is one of the primary versions of history that gets told about Cabo Pulmo. There are other histories as well.

Lorenzo continues with his version. Jesus had no idea the land would become valuable one day, so he sold it piece by piece, often without papers. Some also say he

gambled it away. Regardless, Lorenzo tells me about multiple land conflicts that took place in Cabo Pulmo in the past. This includes a couple of “land invasions,” the last one in 2009. According to Lorenzo, about forty people from outside the community invaded Cabo Pulmo point, cut fence wires, and tried to claim the land. The Castro family sent their own people, armed with machetes, shovels, and even Molotov cocktails. There was a confrontation. Someone smashed a person’s car. And the invaders finally backed down and retreated. Later, Lorenzo tells me, he saw one of the men who took part in the invasion when he ran into him in the nearby town of La Ribera. “Why are you doing this?” he asked the man. He answered: “Because there’s no work.” Lorenzo thought for a minute, then summed up the whole situation...in terms of money and value. It comes down to the *valor de la tierra* (land values), he tells me. The conflicts, he explains, are all because “people are *walking on money*.” He finishes the story with a question: “Who could have guessed that this land would someday be worth so much?”

Who could have guessed?

Much like the working class residents of Cairo in Julia Elyachar’s ethnography, the people who called the East Cape home were often dismissed, written off, and cast aside by the outside world—and their own government. The Baja peninsula as a whole has been marginalized from Mexican politics—and history—for generations. The East Cape is just one of its many formerly unknown and disparaged hinterlands. It was long seen as an impediment to development, a barren, worthless place (see Alvarez 1991; Krutch 1986). But the people who lived there—descendants of missionaries, native peoples, even fabled castaways—have found ways to survive. They have created places of meaning and community, places with long histories. They are and have been *valuable places*.

Today, small communities along the East Cape, such as Cabo Pulmo, are increasingly recognized by the outside world—not to mention the Mexican government—as valuable places. They are places worthy of investment (see Li 2014) and exploitation. This change of heart was undoubtedly influenced by the East Cape’s beauty, ecological diversity, and uniqueness. But this is also because it’s a place where many outsiders hope to make money. This reconsideration of the East Cape as a renewed place of value, worthy of effort and attention, has also resulted in a broad “conceptual shift” (to

use Elyachar's terms). It's a shift in which the formerly meaningful or valueless is suddenly recast as vital and important. It's a shift through which supposedly desolate, barren coastlines become conceptually and discursively transformed into places of solitude, beauty, and luxury—ripe for capitalist investment. This shift occurs through the work of realtors, developers, government officials, planners, and others who help to inscribe the land, ultimately, as a commodity that is commensurable with other commodities (i.e. real estate) around the world (see Li 2014). The East Cape is in the early stages of this process of commoditization. Los Cabos, on the other hand, has been thoroughly transformed into a location that is dominated by the global tourism and real estate economies. The future of the East Cape has not yet been determined. But will it follow the path of Los Cabos?

The East Cape is no longer a dangerous, remote place. It's no longer the worthless, "forgotten peninsula" (Krutch 1986) of the Mexican nation. It's a place of pride. It's a safe, appealing, inviting place that promises high returns on investment. It also promises exclusivity—lonely beaches, wide open spaces, and distance from overdeveloped urban centers. For Mexican businessmen, government officials, and politicians, and a slew of international investors, it's a place that's primed and ready for integration into the global market. Suddenly, there's a lot of money to be made from this place with no value. But at whose expense?

Marx's task was to expose and radically challenge a system that he felt put *things* ahead of *people*. Marx's theoretical work was meant to reverse this dynamic, to free people from the capitalistic tyranny of things (see Hart 2011:8). As David Graeber explains, Marx viewed the capitalist system as perverse because "it saw human beings primarily as a means to produce wealth rather than the other way around" (2005:223). Most debates about Marx's theory of value, Graeber continues, completely miss the point. The point of Marx's theory was to critically question why "we continually recreate a world we don't like, that we find unjust, and in which we have lost control" (2005:222). Marx's question was why *making money* has come to take precedence over *making humanity*.

Graeber argues that value theory gives us a way to understand that the "ultimate stakes of politics are the ability to define what's important in life to begin with"

(2005:15; see also 2013:226). “In value terms,” he continues, “the question becomes: who has the right to translate their money into what sorts of meaning?” (2005:14). Elyachar writes of the expanding neoliberal market as a process that is “simultaneously a mode of dispossessing the poor” (2005:13). What is being dispossessed, ultimately, is the ability to meaningfully participate in defining value—or, what truly matters in human social life.

The East Cape of Baja California Sur is one more site, among many, of dispossession. In the name of social and economic progress, places and communities are being made subservient to development models and real estate markets that, unmistakably, make the needs of people—and communities—subservient to making money. The slow, grinding process of commoditization continues to push residents like Pedro aside, those who do not have access to enough money to stay afloat and survive the rising economic tide. Money reigns supreme here. It is the access pass that allows some people in and pushes others to the margins. The East Cape, like Cabo San Lucas, Cancún, and so many places before it, is in the midst of a process in which money is rapidly becoming the defining value system. This dispossession eliminates other possibilities, meanings, and potential values. It all begins when the unique *values* of a place are subsumed by and transformed into the commensurable, comparable *value* of global markets.

This process of transformation is incomplete. Many residents of the East Cape feel that Cabo San Lucas’s path is their inevitable future. So they prepare their exodus accordingly. Others, however, hold out hope for an alternative future. These alternative visions of development are explored in more depth in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: What development means**

*All the other and varied attempts to 'develop' the area in one way or another have ended in dismal failure, for the land has always returned to its own wild self--as though it had merely shaken off the annoyance of conquistador and priest, land promoter and engineer. A century ago it almost became a part of the United States, but it didn't, and its whole history has been a series of almos.*

-JW Krutch, 1959

#### **Development encounters**

When a place that was “worthless” for several decades suddenly becomes a commercial and real estate gold mine<sup>20</sup>, things are going to change—and change often comes with a nice dose of social conflict. When the Mexican government started building a national tourism economy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Baja peninsula transformed from a supposedly barren, undesirable place to one of Mexico’s most highly prized territories. This is especially the case for the southern state of Baja California Sur (BCS). The East Cape—located on the other side of the world famous tourism destination of Los Cabos—is one part of BCS that’s just now getting a lot of attention from the government, investors, and developers. It’s a large tract of prime coastal real estate that, according to some, is just waiting for development.

Development is another one of those concepts that seems to have almost endless meanings. Development can be seen alternatively as economic and social progress (e.g. Rostrow 1990), a hegemonic set of discourses and practices (e.g. Escobar 1995), a potential source of freedom (e.g. Sen 1999), or the failed promises of modernity (e.g. Ferguson 1999). Development has been described as a coercive process (e.g. Ferguson 1994) and something that many people around the world demand, despite its problems (see Hart and Payadachee 2010; Edelman and Haugerud 2007). Considering the tremendous range the term potentially covers, the search for one over-arching definition might be beside the point. Rather, we should focus on the *intentions* behind development and, further, *who decides* what development will be (see Crewe and Axelby 2012). If development is broadly seen as *planned change* directed toward serving the desires and

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<sup>20</sup> In the 1980s, a piece of coastal property in Cabo Pulmo was valued between \$5,000 and \$10,000 USD (see Weiant 2005). Today, the same piece of property might be priced anywhere from \$500,000 up, depending on market conditions.

interests of particular actors, the goal is to discover the intentions of those actors and the power dynamics that give voice to some while silencing others. Development is the physical, social, and geographic realization of values. But whose values? To answer this question we can turn to ethnography and seek to delineate the meanings and outcomes of development through the “social realities of people” (Sardan 2005 in Crewe and Axelby 2012).

The East Cape is one of the latest formerly “out of the way” places to be pulled into global tourism development. Coastal tourism, in particular, is the dominant form of international tourism development today (Honey and Krantz 2007:66). Despite this dominance, international tourism development is replete with persistent problems and challenges in destinations around the world, including: 1) disputes over land ownership; 2) displacement of local populations; 3) conflicts over access to and control of water supplies; 4) environmental degradation; and 5) conflicts between the short term interests of developers and the long term interests of nearby communities (see Honey and Krantz 2007: 91). Many of these problems and inequalities pervade tourism destinations around the world, including the Dominican Republic (Gregory 2007; Brennan 2004), Madagascar (Duffy 2008), Costa Rica (van Noorloos 2011), Sri Lanka (Klein 2007), the Caribbean (Moreno 2005), Portugal (Neves-Graca 2004), and Honduras (Stonich 1998, 1999). Many of these problems are readily apparent in BCS, especially in places such as Los Cabos, where land disputes, environmental concerns, and economic differences are rampant. Out on the East Cape, these problems are just beginning.

The East Cape is no longer insulated from the flows of global capitalism and development. Life is changing in this part of BCS—quickly. Some say it’s already doomed, on its way to being swallowed up by the development and urbanization processes that are expanding out of Los Cabos to the south and La Paz to the north. Serge Dedina, founder of the highly active NGO Wildcoast, told me that he thinks the future of the region will be characterized by “non-stop development and wall-to-wall condos just like San Jose” because there are “too many people with too many interests.” Others paint a more optimistic picture, hoping that development will bring more jobs, services, and economic growth to the East Cape. The future is anything but clear, pre-determined, or set. Even though many people claim to know what’s going to happen, the form that

development takes in the region is still yet to be defined. Granted, there are powerful interests in Mexico and abroad who have their own ideas about what they want to see happen there. But they aren't the only players, even if they are some of the most powerful.

On the other end of the spectrum, there's a wide range of residents who have their own multifaceted hopes and expectations about what they want for the future of their home. The fate of development rests upon a mass of conflicted desires, hopes, interests, and expectations. In the midst of those tangled desires and interests, there are the people who live and work on the East Cape. This chapter seeks to understand the meaning(s) of development through the stories and experiences of a selection of those residents.

### **The talk of development**

One of the primary goals of my fieldwork was to situate the concept of development within the lived experiences and meanings of people who call the East Cape home. I worked primarily with residents in the coastal communities of La Ribera, Las Barracas, and Cabo Pulmo (the latter of which was my base of operations). During my interviews, I asked people how and why they ended up on the East Cape, how it has changed over time, and what "development" means to them. I also talked to people about the two large-scale tourism development projects in the region that were grabbing so much attention: Cabo Cortés (located near El Rincon/Punta Arena) and Cabo Riviera (located alongside the pueblo of La Ribera)<sup>21</sup>. My conversations with people about these projects yielded great insights into the ideals, values, and politics that inform how people think about development. Both projects offered a way for people to talk about the positives and negatives of development in relation to specific, very real development projects. In fact, when the subject of development came up on the East Cape, in many instances the conversation was at least implicitly about one of those two projects.

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<sup>21</sup> I was never able to interview anyone directly associated with Cabo Cortés--I emailed them and tried to contact them repeatedly with no success. They did not have an office, and there was no office or other physical location where I could contact representatives of the project. This leaves a gap in what I had hoped to accomplish--but it could be that I was trying to contact them well after they were concerned with maintaining good PR. In the case of Cabo Riviera, I was able to talk with two sales representatives from the project. This included a tour of the development itself in early 2012.



One of the last questions I asked was what people hoped or imagined would happen on the East Cape 10-15 years down the road. I had several questions that attempted to reveal the various, multifaceted way in which people think about, talk about, and enact development. The important point here is that the subject of development did not lead to “yes or no” answers, but instead to layered, interconnected thoughts and stories. The meaning of development takes shape through those stories, grounded in lived experiences. The following selections illustrate the range of opinions, perspectives, and understandings that residents of the East Cape have about the broad social process we call development. I chose these nine examples to provide a range of some of the different perspectives and opinions that exist among various residents in this part of the East Cape.

The main fault line between these individuals is their overall optimism or pessimism about development itself. Some of the people I talked with have more hopeful views about development, while others told me they explicitly “fear” the concept and what it will bring to the East Cape. However, almost to a person, further conversation reveals that the majority of people, with a few exceptions, focus on talking about the kind of development they would like to see happen on the East Cape. Out of 42 total interviews, the vast majority were against Cabo Cortés and the standard large-scale development models that shaped the Los Cabos tourism zone. Most of my interviewees talked about smaller-scale development, alternative development, or sustainable development. Above all, however, by sharing these stories I want to illustrate how different perspectives and opinions about development are best understood within the wider social context of each person’s lived experiences. Development isn’t simply a yes or no proposition. It’s a question that has deep political, economic, personal, and philosophical implications for the people who find themselves in its path. Despite some of the differences that exist in these narratives, there is a strong consensus in favor of smaller-scale development that puts people and/or the local environment ahead of money, massive growth, greed, and economic indicators.

### **La profesora**

The first time I ever met Bertha was after a community meeting in Cabo Pulmo in June 2012. There were about 12 people in the “Casa del Tamarindo,” which is the main

office and meeting space for Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP). Like many of the other meetings, there was a small, dedicated audience. About a dozen people, most of them women. Not a massive crowd, but there is that saying about what a small group of committed people can do.<sup>22</sup> During my fieldwork I learned that this small group of women was one of the main driving forces behind local conservation.

Bertha was the second speaker of the day. Her talk focused on the need to create and support a regional development plan for the East Cape. Unlike much of the rhetoric coming from ACCP, which focuses mostly on saving Cabo Pulmo, Bertha's talk was the first time I heard someone talking about a broader strategy for dealing with development on the East Cape.

Months later we met for an interview at the RARE offices in La Ribera. It's just a little building right in the heart of the pueblo, with a fence around it, recycling containers in front, and logos for ACCP and RARE on the wall outside the main door. It's easy to pass by. We talked inside the main office. Bertha sat at the desk, the sunny window behind her.

She was born in the pueblo of La Ribera. On the edges of the pueblo, she told me. Although born in La Ribera, Bertha grew up mostly in La Paz. Her family moved to Tecate for a very short time, then settled in La Paz. But they would come back to La Ribera to visit family, and often drive even further to visit her grandparents in Las Barracas. But travel wasn't easy in those days. Her nuclear family was in La Paz, she explained, but

...all of our roots, especially because of my mother and father, were here. So we came to this place, but not very often because it was very isolated. We would leave in the early morning ... in a jeep, a lot like yours, which my father had, but his didn't have a cover. We were on the road all day. The trans-peninsular highway wasn't there. We arrived in the night in the place that today is the Surgidero, down near La Capilla where they are making the Anhelito development, that's where we stopped. And then again the next day we left very early in the morning to get to Las Barracas. We would arrive that night at Las Barracas. We would do this once, sometimes twice a year, to visit our grandparents [you can almost hear the smile of memory here]. And we came to La Ribera 2-3 times per

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<sup>22</sup> This saying is often attributed to the late Margaret Mead, but it remains unclear whether she actually said it or not. There is no clear source that indicates she either wrote or said those words.

year. All of the roads were complicated back then, but the road from here to Las Barracas was even worse.

Her grandparents owned land in a place known today as “Las Barracas,” which is located just north of Cabo Pulmo. They had a small cattle ranch there, a small farm, a well for water. They didn’t leave the ranch much, Bertha explains. . Their primary livelihood was cattle ranching, but they also had land dedicated to agriculture. The family, she tells me, was “deeply rooted to this place.” They had a close connection to the land itself:

Well...our family, my mother and father, always instilled us with a culture of *el amor de la tierra* [love of the earth/land]. More *al monte* [the forest/bush], not so much the ocean, because for my grandfather, even though he lived near the ocean, the ocean was [considered] dangerous, and [also] my mother even though [La Ribera] was a fishing and agricultural community, she was from the agricultural line, so the ejiditarios only ate the fish that was caught by the fishermen, they weren’t exposed to the sea ... they had a deep love for the earth.

Back in those days La Ribera was just a small, typical little *sudcaliforniano* pueblo. Like many other small ranchos along the southern part of the Baja California peninsula. The houses were made of *palo de arco*, *barro*, and adobe. It was an isolated place, Bertha remembers, and there was a lot of poverty. Her grandparent’s ranch was also isolated, she says, but there wasn’t the same sense of poverty as there was in the pueblo because of all the cattle and subsistence farming. There were shortages, mostly because of the isolation, she says, but her family always had enough to eat. It was nothing like the pueblo. Despite the distance, and the fact that her family lived in La Paz, they had a close relationship as a family.

Her grandfather’s sister, Meri Montaña, owned all of the land from Las Barracas to Cabo Pulmo. She was the first private landowner of Cabo Pulmo, Bertha explained. The Montaña family was the biggest landowner in the area. Meri—Bertha’s *tia abuela*—stayed in Cabo Pulmo, where she was primarily dedicated to fishing mother of pearl. She had a modest house. Her workers lived near her, and she had a close relationship with them. Meri and Bertha’s grandmother did not have a lot of contact because of the bad roads between Cabo Pulmo and Las Barracas. In those days, they used horses and mules for transport and travel. Many people passed back and forth between Cabo Pulmo and Miraflores.

Her grandparents had to sell their place in the mid-1970s because her grandfather had cancer. “When they sold the land,” she recounts, “it was a painful blow for my family.” It affected them deeply when they had to leave the land. They didn’t return for ten years, she says. For a long time, it was a place they could not bear to return to. “When we did return in the middle of the 1980s, ten years later, there were a lot of changes.”

The Montaña family also parted with their land in Cabo Pulmo when Meri Montaña passed away. When she died, Bertha explained, she left everything to Jesus Castro Fiol, who worked for her for many years. Jesus Castro Fiol was the patriarch of the Castro family, the beginning of a familial connection to Cabo Pulmo that continues to this day.

When Bertha returned years later, things were very different. She didn’t recognize the hills, the place that was her grandparents’ land. There were so many dramatic changes, she said. All of them were very recent—from around 2000 onward. The roads between Barracas and Pulmo were much better by the mid-1990s, and this meant more tourists, new residents, and increased development. Cabo Pulmo was a completely different place, with better roads and a new, growing community of what Bertha and many other Mexican residents refer to as “*extranjeros*” (foreign residents).<sup>23</sup> La Ribera had changed too—the houses were different, and it also had a new community of *extranjeros*.

We talk about the meaning of development. I ask her what it means to her. She answers:

It would mean the improvement of the quality of life of the people who live here. That they live better. That they care for the resources. And that there are economic benefits and productive economic activities for everyone. That’s the significance of development for me—that the communities live better.

“And what do you think about Cabo Cortés?” I ask. She replies:

I feel that in this zone there should be, well, exploitation of resources but with a certain balance. With balance in the fundamental ecosystems in the region that the communities require, that gives them identity. With respect to the well-being of the communities, I think that many of the macro-developments, many of which are connected with large chains of capitalists, financiers, realtors, well, in reality they come for their own interests and don’t worry too much about local

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<sup>23</sup> Many Mexican residents use the term “*extranjero*” as a more neutral alternative to the word “*gringo*,” which can have negative connotations depending on the context.

communities. We haven't talked about the San Jose-San Lucas zone, but those of us who live here knew that region when it was another thing, no? I had the opportunity to work in Los Cabos in the 1970s at the beginning of the FONATUR development projects. And it was really horrifying. To start to see how the people began to arrive, and how the local population started to ... lose that local place. So, I am not in favor of these macro-developments. I am not in favor of the arrival of large flows of migrant workers, or that the employees [the developers] look for come from those migrant flows. This is a [laughs] position that has been discussed a lot. I understand that human rights give you mobility to live in places that, in the end, are for everyone, for every Mexican. And equally that you can look, as a Mexican, for the place where you can live best. It has cost me a lot, to accept this. And I have a strong tendency to think that our territory should not change much in terms of population and urban development. I wish from the bottom of my heart that I could stop these grand processes of urbanization and investment, which attract all these flows and become uncontrollable. And so it's a myth that we're going to generate employment, better income, and benefits if these things continue, no? I know that this position is debatable. I have worked a lot to try to understand that these places cannot remain pristine or almost pristine, and that there has to be a population—and enjoyment of the region's resources. So, because of this I am very interested in focusing on what we can do to plan the future of the region. I am very convinced of this need.

In terms of the future, Bertha said she doesn't want to see La Ribera grow too much. She wants it to remain at a moderate size, but also wants to see more employment opportunities for the people who live there. "I think it will be fine if there are more hotel and residential investments, but at manageable scales," she explained. Moreover, she does not want to see local families displaced; she wants them to be able to continue living in La Ribera. She made a point of saying that she wants to see public beach access maintained: "I don't think these developments should be right on the edge of the ocean—they should be set further back." There's no reason, she said, why they have to be right on the water's edge, blocking all coastal access. Overall, she told me, she'd like to see a small pueblo with better services—modern, while retaining its "balance".

### **Away from the thick of things**

I interviewed Rich and Andrea at their place in Cabo Pulmo toward the end of April 2012. The winter winds had already given way to heat and humidity. I arrived at their house, which is back up in the hills of Cabo Pulmo, at around three in the afternoon. Their house is set back from the main community, up on a ridge that provides a wide view of the surrounding desert landscape, the ocean off in the distance. We sat down at

their new leather table on the deck to talk. They are a recently retired couple who used to run a health food store back in Washington State. Rich is in his early 70s, and Andrea is in her mid-60s. They started visiting Cabo Pulmo about 10 years ago, and they would return to visit about twice a year for 2-3 weeks each time. When they first saw Cabo Pulmo and the East Cape it was “love at first sight,” Rich told me.

They made the decision to buy land and build a house almost immediately. When I asked them what drew them to this place, they both agreed that the “remoteness” was a key factor. They said they wanted to be “away from the thick of things.” Rich told me he felt that it seemed almost like an “undiscovered” place, especially since the lot they chose was at the end of a long dirt road, located slightly away from the main community. They were also very attracted to the idea of joining what they saw as a mixed community: “I remember we were really excited about how the Mexicans are here and it isn’t just gringos,” Andrea explains, “it’s a Mexican community that lives here that we’re going to be a part of—that really attracted us.”

When I asked them what they thought about the development plans of Cabo Cortés, Andrea glanced at my digital recorder, smiled, and then extended her two middle fingers to the sky, flipping off the entire idea of the project. She told me it was “outrageous...a devastating idea” and an “absolute, horrible act of greed and ignorance.” Rich adds that he thinks it makes no sense to try to put another Cancún close to the reef at Cabo Pulmo, and says that in his view the availability of potable water is one of the biggest issues--sewage is another. He explains that there could be some benefit from the project if it leads to an increase in environmental and development rights groups and more attention to creating what he calls a “pioneering eco-tourism community.” A few minutes later Andrea expresses a similar sentiment when she says that Cabo Cortés could be a “blessing in disguise—as long as it never happens.” Her point, similar to the one that Rich made, was that fear of this large development could actually spark the kind of social change she wanted to see.

Toward the end of the interview, I ask what development means to them. This shifts the discussion away from specifics like the actual project at Cabo Cortés to more general, abstract feelings and concerns.

Rich says the first thing that comes to mind for him is the phrase “you can’t stop progress.” He continues to explain his point, saying that a lot of the stories we attach to development need to change and that people need to rethink what the word means. He says he thinks people should be thinking more in terms of *community development* [his emphasis] and pushing for eco-tourism “where people learn how to do things better.” He sums up his point by saying that we need to seek out “good development.”

Andrea’s first reaction to the word “development” is negative, she tells me. However, she adds:

There’s a tendency I think, and I can only speak for myself...to feel like ‘I’ve found my paradise and I don’t want anybody coming in on it,’ you know? ‘I like the peace and quiet here, I don’t want any more people...I don’t want any kind of development.’ To me, my first reaction to development is a negative one. I don’t want development. But I’ve learned, during this time here with all of these issues coming up, more along the lines of what [Rich] is saying—that there’s good development and there’s bad development ... Developing in and of itself isn’t a bad word. I mean—developing: When you grow up you develop; a young woman develops. A young man develops—so developing isn’t a bad thing but how you do it, within what framework ... the framework has to be harmony and sustainability. And that’s what we’re not seeing because the developers generally that we see...are just greedy. They’re only about money. They make their money [and] leave—they don’t care about anything else. So if you can have areas develop in healthy ways...nothing wrong with that. And I even will concede that it’s ok to have more people in the community—as long as you’re living right and as long as you’re respecting each other...that’s a good thing. I have to say that my view has changed because when I was living in Montana, developers, by definition, were just evil. I mean...we hated them. And most of them, you know, are developing in an improper fashion and it is about greed. But it doesn’t mean that it has to stay there, it doesn’t mean that we can’t learn to do eco-development. To really do things right. There’s nothing wrong with sharing land, and sharing water, and sharing food...with other people—it’s necessary.

When Andrea finishes talking, Rich adds, "If someone is going to develop, nature has rights, and those have to be respected. You have to take away the corporate veil—personal wealth can't be protected by this veil. People have to be responsible for what they do." For Andrea, money and greed seem to be the primary impediments to the achievement of "good development". For Rich, it's more about responsibility. But he's not just talking about responsibility toward other people; he's talking about the need for accountability toward nature.

What about 10 years in the future? I ask. What do you want to see happen here on the East Cape? Andrea gives me a run-down list: eco, green, ecotourism, the rights of nature. She says she wants the future to entail “working with people and nature to do things right, and not to do any harm.” Rich says that he wants to see the Mexican families on the East Cape live more prosperously each year—in the most sustainable way possible. He said he wants to see the East Cape set an example for the whole planet when it comes to development.

Andrea jumps back in. She brings up the possibility of making the whole Sea of Cortez have the “rights of nature”<sup>24</sup>—of making it an ecologically sound place. That would be ideal, she says, something that needs to be done at the global scale. Andrea explains that we need to:

raise the consciousness of people, get rid of the greed and all the money interests and live in the way we should be living in harmony--and we're not, all of this development is all about greed--that's key about what's happening, sure they created some jobs but they eventually take their money and leave and then everyone is left with the mess because there was no planning, everyone else is left with the problems. Things have to go in the direction of living in harmony, we're doing our civilization in, if we continue in the vein we are, civilization is on the brink, we need to evolve or dissolve, more people are realizing this, the one percent are destroying the planet, we need to learn to live in harmony or we're not going to be here.

### **A small restaurant by the sea**

Angeles, the manager of the beachside Cabo Pulmo restaurant La Palapa who was introduced in Chapter 1, is 36 years old. The restaurant has a wide open patio filled with blue plastic tables and chairs, all of them with prominent Corona beer labels. La Palapa is one place where Mexican residents and expats come into contact on a regular basis. Angeles speaks excellent English, and a substantial portion of her business comes from the local expats, retirees, and second home owners.

We sat down for our interview late one afternoon. I picked one of the blue plastic tables on the edge of the patio. The gray-blue evening ocean tides calmly swishing, back and forth, back and forth. Since it was still early, the restaurant was empty for the most

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<sup>24</sup> This is a reference to a broad political movement that advocates the idea of endowing nature with legal rights. Rich and Andrea specifically mentioned the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund as one of their inspirations (see CELDF site: <http://www.celdf.org/>). See also the Rights of Nature website (<http://therightsofnature.org/>).



part. A few people, including some employees, were watching TV as they prepared for the night shift. Dishes and silverware clanking here and there. Angeles tells me how she has been managing this place for three years now. She never planned to go into the restaurant business--it's just something that happened along the way. She came back to Cabo Pulmo about 12 years ago to learn that her parents had started the new business. I asked her if life in Cabo Pulmo had changed a lot. Her answer: "Well, it was a very drastic change, no? Because when I came back, I could not believe that my parents had the restaurant, and that there was sufficient business to keep it going ... I came back and they had been open for 6 months. And they had too much work so I had to stay and help them."

Angeles was born in Cabo Pulmo. She went to grade school in nearby La Ribera. Back in those days, she says, life was very different. People were dedicated to ranching—goats, cattle, chickens—and fishing. Commercial fishing. Also pearl fishing. She says there was a lot of poverty back in those days: "There wasn't work, there weren't jobs, sometimes the fish had a market, sometimes there weren't any fish." People had to travel to find work, to places like La Paz and Miraflores. Many of the fishermen had to travel out to the Pacific Coast, Magdalena Bay, to find work. She explains: "there was a lot of poverty; it was hard to send us to school." La Ribera, where she went to school, is about 30 minutes away by car. This trip probably took a bit longer back in the 1980s when she was a girl.

I ask her about business: How are things going? She tells me that she has been pretty busy year round: "The truth is it has been a blessing that we are busy almost all of the year." She tells me that the number of months she is left without work is less these days. I ask if she has seen a change since the community of Cabo Pulmo made the switch from commercial and subsistence fishing to ecotourism: "Yes, our economy is much better, now we can have certain luxuries...well, now each person can have their car...and in that time the people could not have a car." Angeles tells me that the number of cars in Cabo Pulmo back in those days was easy to count. But today, she says, more and more people have vehicles, sometimes two. So, she continues, "Economically we are much better. Even though, well, there are certain limitations."

What do you think about Cabo Cortés I ask. Her answer is direct: she says she doesn't understand why there is a need for another project like that, since the hotel rooms and golf courses in Los Cabos aren't even full. "Why build another here?" she asks me.

We talk about the future of her community. Angeles tells me she wants to keep living in Cabo Pulmo, but she wants it to stay the same, doesn't want it to grow, or maybe just a little. Maybe some more services, a clinic. She doesn't want a city, she says. What about a road, I ask. She speaks about some of the problems of having a road, which would bring in more people, potentially "bad people". People could come in and bring about "disasters" in the night, she says, and take away their peace, tranquility. Like Mike and the other expats who count on the region's bad roads to keep the tourists out, Angeles recognizes that if there was pavement it would make it easier for certain kinds of people to come to Cabo Pulmo. She says overall she would prefer no paved roads. And she doesn't want any big hotels. She wants more services, yes, but she also says she wants to keep the community small. The small, rented bungalows are fine, but she doesn't want to see any large hotels like they are proposing for Cabo Cortés, hotels like they already have over in Los Cabos.

I follow up by asking her how she thinks it would change life in Cabo Pulmo if the project became a reality: "Well," she answers, "it would change drastically for us, because of security." Angeles tell me that if such a project was actually built, they would lose their sense of security. This is the second time she brings up the potential of rising crime and her sense that Cabo Pulmo would be a less secure place. Like Rich, the availability of water is another big concern for her. She says that local aquifer levels are low—there isn't enough water. "We live in the desert! So, with a development of that size alongside [us], imagine!" She says she thinks they will be left without water, pointing to places like Los Cabos where the water infrastructure lags well behind population expansion. She finishes her answer by highlighting one last potential problem: pollution. Her reactions to the possible effects of Cabo Cortés are a laundry list of grievances and worries: security, access to fresh water, pollution. Above all, she looks to places like Los Cabos, and says she thinks Cabo Pulmo will end up going down a similar path if projects like Cabo Cortés are allowed to proceed: "the same thing will happen

here," she says, "We're going to be without schools for our kids, without hospitals, without public services."

Then I ask about the meaning of development. "Development for me," she laughs, "it's something fearful, like fear. Because development means a big city, insecurity, massive growth. I don't know. I love my pueblo as it is—I don't want to see this in my pueblo."

### **Trucking organic produce along the cape**

Oscar is 42. He is a well-known person around Cabo Pulmo, because he's the guy who sells organic produce. He's popular among the expats mostly, and some of the restaurant owners. So this means his big business really happens twice a year: Spring (March through May) and Fall/Winter (October through December). These are the peak times for tourists and expats. In the middle of summer, when there are only a few gringos around, it's basically pointless for him to make the long, dusty drive from Miraflores, which is about 45 minutes away (depending on how fast you drive, and the condition of your vehicle) because only a handful of expats stay in Pulmo throughout the summer.

Oscar has had some trouble in Cabo Pulmo in the past. He used to try to set up and sell on one side of the community where most of the Mexican residents live, but this upset some people. Especially the family that runs a small *tienda* on that side of town--they felt that Oscar was competing with their business, so they ran him out of town. This happened a while back. Eventually, he started setting up over on the gringo side of Cabo Pulmo, on the side of the road right next to the property of one of the long-time residents. Since few Mexicans come to this side of town, things have been working out pretty well.

He is a busy person, but in a relaxed way. He likes to talk, and always takes the time to ask how I am doing when I buy produce from him. I finally got the chance to interview him one afternoon as he was waiting for people to show up. His black pickup was parked nearby. On this day his produce was a bit limited, but he had some good stuff: tomatoes, small yellow squash, baby carrots. As we talked, people came and went, some buying, some browsing. I leaned up against a stack of his plastic produce boxes, took out my notepad, and ask Oscar if he has time for a short interview. No problem, he says.

Oscar was born up in Mexicali, in the northern state of Baja California. He first arrived in BCS back in 1991, stayed for a short while, and then headed back north. He came back down to Miraflores in 1999. When I asked him how much time he spends in this part of Baja he said: "All year, and I don't want to leave." He runs an organic farm and travels around the cape region selling produce. He first came to Cabo Pulmo about four years ago. Now he makes the trip once a week because the business--with all the tourists and residents--is pretty good. "What do you think about Cabo Pulmo?" I ask. He replies: "There's not much development here," and goes on to tell me that the local Mexicans really don't buy what he sells. Only a few good friends are willing to buy. The local community has never had much interest in buying or selling his products. He says it's good working with the *extranjeros*. Because of the problems with some of the local Mexican residents, he decided to avoid bringing certain things so there's no worry about competition. "It's the right thing to do because I'm from the outside," he tells me.

I ask what "development" means to him. Oscar answers: "Progress. Sources of work. There aren't many sources of work around here." His answer is efficient, without much elaboration. He tells me there aren't many jobs around this part of Baja, including Cabo Pulmo. I ask him what he thinks about Cabo Cortés. Oscar tells me he doesn't like "those kinds" of projects. His answer focuses on how development projects, like Cabo Riviera in La Ribera, have affected life here in BCS:

In La Ribera you can't access the beach anymore. From a certain point of view you feel invaded because you can't go to your places anymore. I can't bring my daughter to these places--where will I take her? La Ribera used to be really beautiful. People talk about progress, but where does all the money go? In [Cabo] San Lucas it used to be really beautiful as well, but now you can't access [the beach] ... and the same thing is going to happen here. People talk about progress and jobs, but it really hasn't happened. Los Cabos used to be really affordable and cheap, but not now. They have made a mess of Cabo San Lucas, and they always blame the gringos, but it was investors from Spain and Mexico [who were at fault].

Oscar likes to talk about the history of the region. He brings up the former mining town of El Triunfo, how it used to be a very powerful economy, how it was going to be the capital of the state. Now, he tells me, only 300 or so people live there and that's all that's left. Oscar says this is all because the Mexican government "es muy cabrón," (which basically translates to "asshole"). He brings up a place called El Mogote. "It used

to be a very clean and beautiful place," he explains, "but now you can't access it. That's the problem, the only problem I have with all of this. The benefits go to *el bolsillo* (the pocket) of the investors, and the people continue, in the same condition."

What would you like to see happen here in 10-15 years, I ask. "If the projects come in here," he tells me, "it will be a loss. But I can't be against that since its progress. Cabo [San Lucas] was like Pulmo, but now you can't get onto the beaches, it's all private, blocked off." Oscar tells me that drugs are a problem in Cabo now, and prostitution. He laments the fact that many people have come from other places to work there, but they decided to stay. It's a mess now, he tells me, "and this is what these projects bring."

I ask: "And what should be done here on the East Cape?" Oscar smiles and says all he knows is that he knows nothing. What does he think? He thinks there's a need to create more jobs, more sources of employment here on the East Cape. He adds: "Focus on what's here, exploit it but without destroying it." There are places to bike, places to watch birds, look for fossils, camp, he tells me. "This place is a paradise," he says, "and when you are in the city you forget these things." Above all, he says, there is a need to create work without destroying places.

### **The coin with two faces**

For the past four years, Alejandro has been the director of the Cabo Pulmo National Park. I never formally met him until I started my fieldwork at the end of 2011. But the first time I ever knew of him was back in 2009 when I was in Cabo Pulmo for some preliminary fieldwork. The community was putting on a fishing tournament, and Alejandro was there to make sure everyone still followed the park rules. He was out there on the water with the fishermen, and there were some grumbles about his presence. That was my first indication of the difficult job he had in Cabo Pulmo. The community has what might be called an "ambivalent" relationship with the park, even though they have grown to accept and support it more and more over the years. Still, there are moments of tension, and Alejandro is in the difficult position of directing the park while also trying to work with the local community. It's an ongoing struggle.

Alejandro is an extremely busy person. He agreed to do an interview when we first met, but it took about seven months for us to finally get the chance to sit down and

talk. We exchanged a lot of emails and tried to set up a time to meet, but his busy schedule was a difficult challenge. I often saw him driving on the dirt roads between La Ribera and Cabo Pulmo--we'd wave and he'd give me a look that meant "Oh ya, I haven't forgotten--we'll meet up soon!" Patience pays off. I finally got the chance to sit down for an interview with Alejandro late one night after a community meeting. We sat down in the dark over near the small park office in Cabo Pulmo.

Alejandro first came to Cabo Pulmo a little over four years ago, when he landed the job as the park director. Before that he spent several years working at a marine reserve in Quintana Roo. I asked him what it was like to start all over in Pulmo. He told me it was difficult, since he was only 29 and it was a lot of responsibility to be in charge of the park. Alejandro also told me there were a lot of issues that needed to be confronted. One of the major issues was that CONANP, the governmental agency that he works under, had very little presence in the region. When he started working, he had no staff, no boat, no office, nothing. Along with that, working in Cabo Pulmo was especially difficult because there was a lot of resistance from the local community. CONANP was trying to impose rules and regulations, and many community members resented those changes. The park was created back in 1995, but it took several years for the community to turn around and support the effort. Some continue to resist to this day, but this is less so today than a decade ago, he says.

I ask Alejandro what development means to him. He answers:

I see it as [pauses for a few seconds] something like a coin with two faces, no? I don't want to call it a double-edged sword, but a concept that...to have a development it does not mean that you have more people, or more roads, or more...more and more, no? But it's like ... development should be focused on activities that strengthen economic indicators, health indices, and standards for communities.

He continues:

I am not just referring to natural resources, but also intellectual resources, your imagination, your motivations...your development as a person, as an individual. Development for me is like a growth in your learning, your perceptions, your abilities to develop.

When Alejandro says that development is like a coin with two faces, he contrasts two very different versions of the concept. One focuses on ideas like economic growth,

improved standards of living, health, and even education. As Alejandro explains, the other side of the coin refers to development as "everything big, bigger, do it stronger, expand it, expand it. And well, this expansion that you do, you end up knocking down what's all around you."

Development is a big word, I say. It's difficult to understand. Alejandro replies: "Yes, these concepts are always complicated--it's not that they are bad, but sometimes the ways in which they are used--OY!--create doubt, no? Or throw you off balance." Continuing with the theme, but focusing a bit more, I ask him what he thinks about Cabo Cortés. He sighs, taking in the question, then answers:

Look...I am going to talk to you like a public servant, outside of Alejandro the person. I am developing a project here [he's referring to the national park at Cabo Pulmo], I have a clear plan, and I have seen, from this angle, the—well, this type of development. If you talk about Cabo Cortés or whatever, these types of tourist developments or large projects—this brings us back to the question of development. Big projects like this, at the national level, they are necessary because they bring resources, so that a country can generate investments, employment, and develop wealth, services, demand, no? So you can look at it from that point of view. But from the local perspective, these types of projects, the plans that they are presenting, or the terms in which they present...they fill us with serious reservations.

Here he contrasts what a development project can mean at various levels of social organization. At the national level, a large scale project like Cabo Cortés can bring in the revenue and create the jobs to build wealth. From this level, these kinds of projects are positive. But, he argues, there are serious doubts at the local level. In the case of Cabo Cortés, he explains, the project raises a "red flag" when seen from a social, economic, or conservation-based perspective. And that needs attention, he tells me. Part of his concern here focuses on the fact that Cabo Cortés is one of many development projects. Cabo Cortés is easy to focus on, he says, because it has generated a lot of attention and polemic debate. But there are many "smaller, ant-like developments" that, when put together, create some formidable problems.

I ask Alejandro about the future of the region: "What would you like to see here in 10-15 years?" Alejandro starts off telling me that park directors and CONANP commission members have to think beyond the borders of parks. They can't just focus on the spaces inside parks and protected areas. They have to literally leave these areas and seek out plans that facilitate the conservation of the area's resources:

So other factors enter that are very interesting—the social questions that you have to look at, how communities perceive the damages to the protected areas...if they are conscious of the services that they are providing, say, to their daily lives. Like fisheries, in the case of Cabo Pulmo [it's] an area that's a no-fishing zone, and well, to know if the fishermen from La Ribera, or the ones who come from La Paz, or San Jose, understand that having spaces like this allows them to continue working in surrounding areas. And on the other side there is also the [fact that] protected areas are not horns of plenty, no? They can't be expected to carry the responsibility to generate the total development of a region, no? Simply because there's a space that can be restricted from certain activities, and that creates a change in the activities or the rhythm of life of some sectors, no? So, in this sense, I think that the difficult part of this exercise is that at one scale of the region, some hundreds of kilometers can be interconnected, so that different communities or productive sectors...can strengthen and connect their productive chains [and] create an internal market, a dynamic that permits these activities to be sustainable over time, in order to keep growing. I would like a coast, an East Cape where they conserve, or maintain attributes at the national level that ... continue supporting ecological or biological processes...that benefit us in the end, no? Hopefully certain instruments will exist that [can] permit the regulation of growth—to establish limits for exponential growth, no? It's development again. It's growth, but growth that does not mean *poblar todo la costa*, no?

Growth doesn't have to mean we populate the whole coast.

### **Keep it peaceful**

Elisa is young, and very active in the community of Cabo Pulmo. She is 29 years old. She was born in San Jose del Cabo and came to Pulmo when she was 20 days old. She is the *subdelegado* for the community, the main political representative. She has had this position for one year and four months, she tells me. She works in a small government office at the northern edge of the community--a yellow building surrounded by a chain-link fence. The building itself is located on the only public piece of land in Cabo Pulmo, aside from the beaches. Although there are some disputes in the community about whether or not the land on which the *subdelegado* rests actually belongs to the Mexican government.

Elisa goes to all the community meetings and events, regardless of which faction sponsors them (there is a bit of a split between the main family in the community and the other two families, and for this reason certain events are only attended by particular factions). She works in the *subdelegado* office in the mornings, from about 8am until mid-afternoon. I would often see her early in the morning as I was either talking with people or going out for a walk, since the office was right near the place where I stayed.



We talked about doing an interview for a couple of months, but it took a while for us to get the chance to meet up since she is always busy, often having to make trips back and forth between Pulmo and other surrounding communities. We finally got the chance to talk one November morning.

We met around mid-morning. The building is also used as a school for the younger kids of the community and usually there are about a dozen kids running around and playing. This day was a holiday, so the building was pretty quiet. We sat down in her small, clean, simple office. The already hot sun was beaming through the window, but the room was still comfortably cool. A new learning center was being built next door, and the noise from that crept into our conversation every now and then. Elisa talks in a quiet, polite voice, and would answer questions in a short but friendly way.

I start off the interview with the question about the meaning of development: "If I say the word development, what is it for you? What is development for a community?"

She answers:

For me development of a community would be...to have a school, to have electricity. Have a road. Have adequate public services. That those who have businesses don't have to fight for ice, don't have to fight for gas, and have the ability to develop themselves, without things being too complicated. Why? Because if your house or business starts to get ahead, obviously the community starts to develop itself. For me, this is development of a community. If we are talking about coastal development, well, you already know, we want sustainable development. So that they don't bring bad things, instead of helping us.

I ask her about the kinds of things she wants to see in terms of development for Cabo Pulmo. She reiterates her previous answer, telling me that the community should have "the basic services that a community should have" such as a *centro de salud* and a school.

Next I ask her what she thinks about Cabo Cortés. "It's so big," she says, "that it won't even benefit the people of Buena Vista or Los Barriles" [these are two of the largest and most developed communities on the East Cape]. She continues: "We don't need something that big." She explains that the marina isn't necessary, since there's already going to be a marina in the Cabo Riviera project at La Ribera. "I don't like this at all," she concludes.

"Do you know if a lot of people in La Ribera are in favor [of Cabo Cortés], or just some?" I ask. Elisa tells me that she thinks many people are in favor, but they have been

manipulated into this position. When I ask her what she means, she explains that most of the workers for the project are going to come from other parts of Mexico--from "el interior" as she says it. Most of the jobs, she tells me, are going to go to people with the right experience, and they will be from outside as well. This is why she thinks many La Ribera community members have been manipulated: they have been promised thousands of jobs by the developers of Cabo Cortés, but in reality those jobs will end up in other hands.

I close the interview with an open question about what she wants to see happen in Cabo Pulmo in the next 10-15 years. She answers that she hopes she's still in Pulmo in 15 years. "Hijole! Fifteen years!" she says. She hopes, more than anything, she says, that one of the property owners will donate some land for public use, "so they can do everything that the government can do." She also wants to see the community work with "sustainable development". She wants the Mexican government to keep supporting projects that are more ecological, that conserve, like solar power projects. She also doesn't want to see all of the land sold to foreign developers: "Because this is the worst--one cannot do the impossible to conserve nature, because if there's a demand to sell to a foreign developer it doesn't matter what people say--do you understand?"

Elisa concludes her answer to my last question about the future of Cabo Pulmo: "I hope it keeps being the peaceful community that it is. And the children of our children continue living here free and healthy, well, and that there aren't buildings on the dunes or the coast, and that they are never never never going to close the entrances to our beaches."

### **The writer**

George was the first person I interviewed for this project. When I was doing some early preliminary work, I met and talked with a student/activist/filmmaker in La Paz. She told me there was a writer who lived in La Ribera that I needed to meet. I emailed George and we met in January of 2012. I drove over to the place where he and his wife live, located just up the hill from the Sea of Cortés. It's a modest little house on a corner with a nice yard and a cool, shaded patio. That's where George spends most of his time, he told me. It's also where we did the interview.

George lived in Las Vegas before moving down to Baja full-time. He traveled and fished in central and southern Baja for more than thirty years, and found the East Cape and the pueblo of La Ribera along the way:

When we found this little village we found it to be much more to our liking, and when I was 58 and she was 52 we quit our jobs, took a little bit of money out of our trust fund--our pension fund--came down here bought a small house, near the beach with a nice view of the ocean, and set ourselves up to enjoy the rest of our lives without having to work as we had before in the insurance business. And the tradeoff for us was that this little village with the then 1300 people, the weather, the fishing, everything about this part of the tropics appealed to us and we would trade that for the modern conveniences we would be losing and leaving--including our friends in the United States. And to this date I've been here 16 years, and we have no regrets--our life has been leisurely, it's been worry free, we don't have a mortgage on our house...we only have social security to see us through--but it's enough, and we have--we don't have--we did not bring with us enough need for the very very extensive social activities that one would find accessible in a big city like Las Vegas, NV. So, overall, you could say the reason we lived there is because that's where we could work. And the reason we live here now is because that's where we don't have to work.

I don't ask many questions. George leads the way. Once I started the voice recorder, he took off. His narrative takes us to a discussion about Cabo Riviera, which is being built right below his house. He starts at the beginning, explaining that the developers purchased 800 acres from the local ejido in 2006, "including the places we needed to launch and haul our boats to have quick and easy local fishing in the Sea of Cortez." In short, the developers bought a lot of land, and this included a long stretch of beach that had been used by many local fishermen, including George himself. Access suddenly became one of the big issues:

So everybody in the town was concerned that we would lose such access and that we would lose our identity as a community and be overflowed with tourists, and overwhelmed by the construction of such a grand project, which includes 2 golf courses and space for unnumbered condominiums, hotel rooms, and uh 312 dedicated lots on or around the marina. The process has been slower than we all hoped for, and so far it has been a problem for all the people in the village because of the pollution by the dig, the channel dig, and by the hauling of what could be 350,000 trips ... transporting dirt, rocks, from and to the local areas of quarries. And we have suffered those things so far, but who knows what the future will bring because ... the developers are only land developers and ... are not developers for this project.

I ask George about the community reactions to Cabo Riviera. He tells me that most people aren't going to care much until they see a big change in their lifestyle. Out of

a community of 2,000 people, he tells me, “only seven formed a committee to defend the beach.” That committee is now defunct, he explains, after spending three to four years fighting to keep the beach accessible for fishing. George tells me that many people in La Ribera—and other surrounding pueblos—come to that beach each year for Semana Santa (Easter Week) and other celebrations. They also use the beach as an affordable place to go when they have time off, since they “don’t have the money to travel far and wide and they can get here quickly and enjoy a quiet peaceful place on the beach to swim and frolic with their kids.” George thinks people will be concerned and upset if they knew more about what would happen in the future. “But in my mind,” he says, “I don’t think they have seen the consequences--the unintended consequences of this.”

Earlier in the conversation George mentioned that he thinks the developers of Cabo Riviera want to create a “paradise” that will replace the “natural paradise” that already exists in La Ribera. I ask him what he meant by that and how he thinks the new paradise will change La Ribera, George answers:

I think I have a good example for you. If and when they close the road, no boats will be seen on the beach because you can't get to them back and forth with trucks, gas, and equipment. So the beach will be barren, there won't be any colorful pangas and super-pangas, fishermen with their equipment, or smiling Mexicans and others--travelers--with their vehicles on the beach using the ramadas the government has been putting in down there. So it will be left open and barren for the new owners of the lots and homes to be built there, instead of what exists now.

George emphasizes the importance of understanding that the beaches will, in the end, be emptied of all local life. But there’s an irony to this. He explains that when people come looking to buy property in La Ribera, looking for their “slice of paradise,” the sales people who work for Cabo Riviera are going to take them on a tour in a nice suburban,

And the first place they go is to our beach, to show them how lovely it is, and how wonderfully naturally Mexican it is, to show that the Mexicans are down there fishing, those are their boats, those are the smiling Mexicans, those are their families romping and playing in the sand ... And the thing that attracts them to this area is that it is unspoiled. And the thing they are selling is a dream that it will still be unspoiled, and then when they have the capacity they will spoil it, and make, here, an artificial paradise.

“How would you describe this artificial paradise?” I ask. George replies: “One with no Mexicans in it! Just like Los Barriles. Just like a dozen communities all up and down the Baja peninsula, where the Mexicans can no longer afford to live there.”

When I asked George how he wanted the East Cape to look in the near future, he simply responded, “Just like it is now.”

He said he’d be pleased to hear that Cabo Cortés would not be going forward (this interview took place before it was cancelled), and added that nobody would really care if the developers of Cabo Riviera finished the marina and just left bare land. One of his main concerns at the time was that those developers would walk away and leave a half-finished project...or worse. He explains:

But if it doesn’t go forward, and the water [from the marina] goes in and out, and we don’t become a San Blas full of no-see-ums and mosquitoes because of the murky bottom down there, and they don’t foul our water with salt, nobody will care. If it progresses naturally and profitably for these people--whether the developers leave or not--I think all the townspeople would like that.

In a later follow up interview via email, I asked him again to talk a bit more about what development means to him. His reply:

Because of where I have lived for the last 18 years, in or near areas being ‘Developed’, I think of seaside tourist resorts. New ‘developments’ in San Lucas are all All-Inclusives, which hurts tourism in that city in lots of ways. Don’t know why it is but it seems impossible to make *small* tourist developments, so I guess, like most local gringos (retirees) who want this place to stay quaint and quiet, I fear the word, the concept.

### **The retired judge**

"I'm 71 years old, born in 1941, and I'm a retired judge of the California Superior Court, and I am the founder of what is now the largest dispute resolution company in the world. Along with two other people." So begins the interview with Danny Weinstein.<sup>25</sup>

We're sitting at a breakfast in a little shaded restaurant called El Caballero. We're out on the patio, across the way from his property (which is located right on the ocean front). It's about eight in the morning. When the digital recorder starts, Danny jokes about having to watch what he says. He's always on his smart phone, texting, checking his

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<sup>25</sup> He is also one of the founding members of the Baja Coastal Institute (BCI), a small conservation/sustainable development NGO that provided me with a housing grant. I had never met Danny until long after I'd started my fieldwork. In fact, I think my research focus was a bit worrisome for him at first, since my proposal talked about undertaking a “critical study of development.” Danny, the judge, was very concerned about maintaining objectivity and sticking to the facts. We ironed out some of the differences in time, however.

messages, keeping the fires burning in other parts of the world. He's a busy person. When we start the interview he puts down his phone and gives me his full attention.

Danny first made his way to Cabo Pulmo and the East Cape in the late 1980s, when he traveled down with one of his friends who had just bought land. Back in those days, Danny tells me, the price of land was around ten or twenty thousand dollars for coastal property. He also mentions that his friend, his partner in buying the land, was never quite sure about the legality of his land purchases in those days. Regardless, like Rich and Andrea, like George, when Danny first saw the place, he "fell in love with it" and bought into half of his friend's property. "We had a brick shack, one solar panel, and a toilet that worked with a garden hose," he tells me.

I ask Danny what it was about the place, about Cabo Pulmo, that kept him coming back. He explains that every time he reaches the crest of the hill overlooking Pulmo he, "just bends down to say grace that something like this exists." Later I ask Danny about development, what it means to him:

Development is industrial growth to me--industrial and commercial growth-- in a particular area. And development is not a pejorative word to me. I mean, but neither is it the messiah...or always a socially desirable phenomenon. So to me it's neutral term that involves the commercial and industrial development in a particular area, and there's the whole spectrum of development, from wonderful and thoughtful and well-planned to just...the most egregious, greedy, avaricious stuff in the world that leaves places devastated ... And I have spent a good part of my career mediating large...disputes--environmental waste in both our country and...what development has brought in now, I'm doing cases in Peru and Burma, and Columbia and Turkey, and places where development by corporations has left areas devastated. So I've seen and dealt with the impact of ugly development a lot, but I also have seen places where--with responsible zoning and good development and so on where people get jobs, and dignity, and survival, and all the things that [are] easy for us folks to belittle.

Danny is a judge, and a mediator, and his experiences seem to come out when he talks about development. He seeks neutral ground, and he explains his case methodically. Development, for him, isn't something that's good or bad, positive or negative--it can literally be any number of things. He acknowledges various sides of development, various possibilities. This generalized discussion about development, however, quickly turns to more specific, local development politics:

But, I'm sorry that down here--one of the mistakes that the environmental groups have made is to, you know ... make development the enemy. And it's not. It's

excesses in development, or...impetuous development, or development without information. So, unfortunately words become fighting words and 'I'm anti-development, I'm pro-development' and all that--I don't think any sensible person would come down here and say that in this huge area there isn't room for some...thoughtful and beneficial development--there is.

Here Danny defines what he thinks is the problem: it's not "development," but instead projects that are unplanned, misinformed, or "impetuous." He thinks it's a mistake to think of development as the enemy--and here he is referring specifically to some of the local politics, in which some groups have actively, and openly, resisted many forms of development on the East Cape. This discursive dichotomy—which pits developers against locals or environmentalists—is common on the East Cape, and here Danny argues that there is plenty of space for the right kind of development, what he calls "beneficial development."

Our conversation about development, politics, and conservation then moves toward a discussion about the national park system in the United States, and how that might inform development on the East Cape:

The best thing about our country in some ways is our national [park system], and how we've kept so much of our territory for our kids and grandkids, and yet there's still plenty of room for development. And [the East Cape] is so huge it could accommodate both. Large areas like the park we're in that are protected...and then pockets where there's decent tourist and other industries--to employ more people and ... enjoy this area. It's not like the people who come down here have a right to say, "Ok, preserve it exactly the way [it is]"--you know the traditional knock against environmentalists is the guy who has bought a house at a perfect place on the river and doesn't want anybody else to enjoy it! [laughs] ... So I really think, it's a pretty easy question for me because there's the whole spectrum of development, so...I can give you examples of places around Tahoe and others where there's been good and thoughtful development...and others where they've taken the most beautiful lake in the world and threatened it.

Next we move to the subject of Cabo Cortés. I ask him for his opinions about the project. I think he was waiting for this one too: "You may be disappointed to hear that I didn't get as embroiled in it as this sort of great battle of bad guys, the Huns against the Christians or whatever it was," he tells me. Danny explains that he never believed that they could ever do anything of the size and scope that the planners of Cabo Cortés proposed--he didn't think such a project could really be supported, considering the current global economy. But, he adds, "shame on me if people didn't fight it and we ended up with that massive project." Danny then calls Cabo Cortés a "monstrous" thing without

environmental approval. He is glad people fought against it--a wonderful exercise of small people organizing against big development and stopping it, although they got a big assist from the world economy.

He doesn't think the Mexican government will ever allow it to be the monster it was reported to be. But, he also doesn't think it has to be a bad thing for this community. He thinks that communities such as La Ribera could flourish with a really good, well-planned development. His mediating background, he tells me, says "embrace the enemy," get concessions for green areas, work with them to do a planned development that everyone can be proud of. But instead of this, he says, people are acting like the Republicans and Democrats in the US and "pissing on each other" [he laughs when he tells me this one].

Danny continues, discussing what he thinks need to happen on the East Cape: "So there's a pattern of development that needs to be broken, and Cabo Cortés ... could be something that the Governor and the people around here could be proud of." He says that the area around Cabo Pulmo could provide a pocket that "remains primitive" where people can come to dive, a place that retains its charm—this would be “wonderful,” he says. "It's like, it could be a huge tourist attraction and the families here that were smart enough to support not developing this place and not letting it change will be born out, economically ... and we have this unique opportunity because with all these groups of--merging consciousness--if they can give up the sort of radical politics in it, and they get the concessions they need, we don't have to make all these developers into Darth Vader--they're probably some pretty good folks. You know...hug a developer [laughs]. But make him pay for your parks."

### **Sight unseen**

Saroj was one of my first close contacts on the East Cape. When I was just beginning my fieldwork, several people told me that I should go talk with her. We first met in 2009. My wife and I drove over to Las Barracas on a Tuesday in late June. Saroj and her husband Ron greeted us outside their stone house with a palapa roof and invited us in for a talk. It was the first of many meetings and conversations about the East Cape, Cabo Pulmo, development, conservation, and life in Baja.



We finally met for a more formal interview in 2012. We sat around her dining room table in that stone house and talked for about half an hour or so. Saroj is in her 70s. She and her husband—both of them biologists—were part of a community of UC Riverside professors who bought 400 acres of property in Las Barracas in the late 1960s. This group bought the land from the Montaña family. This is the same land that Bertha's family once called home.

Unlike other expats who purchased land after falling in love with the region, Saroj and Ron bought into the deal "sight unseen." Ron went down to try to find it, but was unsuccessful. Then Saroj flew down, rented a car and tried to find it as well, but she also failed. She stopped at the hotel at Punta Colorada and asked if anyone had heard of the place. They told her to go south, but she didn't have any luck. They finally found the property on the third or fourth attempt. That was in 1975.

The place was already called "Las Barracas" by that time. The Cota family, Saroj explained, had a place called "Rancho Las Barracas" which translates to "the ranch of the little shacks." She said that people used to come from La Ribera to fish, and they set up those shacks on the beach.

A man named Pablo works for Saroj. He has lived in the area his entire life. He was born by a midwife in Las Barracas, Saroj tells me, back in the days when the area was a cattle ranch and highly cultivated. All of that was gone when she and her husband arrived in the mid-1970s. But Saroj's narrative—and knowledge of the history of the area—is influenced not just by her own extensive experiences and memories, but also through her friendship and conversations with Pablo. She knows more about the East Cape, and especially the La Ribera-Las Barracas-Cabo Pulmo region, than most.

Saroj and Ron's house was the first "full-time" house built in Las Barracas. It was also the first built under the new *fideicomiso* system described in Chapter 1. It was completed in 1991. In those days, she explains, people knew they were building in a foreign land with tenuous paperwork, so they only built places they could walk away from.

She explains that the changes in property and real estate law made a big difference in the number of people coming down and investing in second homes. In the late 1990s, real estate, development, and gated communities started to increase. She talks

about rising land values: “What once cost \$2,000 became \$200,000 in a five or six year time ... and then it became a million dollars.”

We talk about Cabo Cortés. Saroj tells me that one of her good friends sold her property to the developers for over a million dollars. That was what made her really pay attention to what was happening. Saroj explains that her prejudices lie with conservation. She says she understands the need for economic development, but argues that it would “convert totally virgin land into Cancún II.” She’s very concerned about the impacts of a development at that scale. If the project were to go through, she says, it would surely bring a huge number of people to what she calls a “fragile area.” She says there would be water problems, and also issues with all of the workers coming from the mainland who have a “displaced people’s mentality” and think they can get away with things they could not in their homeland.

Cabo Cortés would “bring oodles of money” to some people, including officials in the Mexican government, she says. She sees Cabo Riviera in a similar light, noting that it was already causing “havoc” with the fishermen in La Ribera.

Like Rich, and Angeles water is a big concern for Saroj. She says the lack of water is one big reason why Baja California Sur remained undeveloped for so long. Our conversation about water shifts to a broader discussion about development in terms of water, power, and roads. I ask about the implications of development and what it will mean for the East Cape. She begins by talking about all of the people who first moved down to Las Barracas. They were all pretty “self-contained,” she says, and didn’t come down expecting that power would be provided. That meant that anyone who wanted to live down there would have to depend on solar. Saroj says that people from the local Mexican community have repeatedly asked the government officials to bring in power from La Ribera. She’s heard some promises but, so far, that’s all they have been. Promises. But if that happens—if they bring in municipal power—the dynamics of life in the region will change a lot. She explains:

There are a lot of people who are a little reluctant to go solar—they don’t know how to deal with it, how limiting it would be and all that. That keeps a lot of people away, which is good for us. But once that comes in—I think there are three factors—the power, the water, and the road—three elements that are really going to change this neck of the woods. And I think for the worse. Worse in the sense that it will change what we came here for. But then a lot of people will come for

that. There will be a lot more people who would [come here]. We have many close friends in La Ribera who wouldn't think of driving their car on this road—and so we go there at the drop of a hat. So there are a lot of people who would then easily negotiate, build, and find this attractive because there's a huge amount of waterfront property waiting to be developed. It's the road, and the power, and the water.

The question about development, water, power, and roads was supposed to be my last for the interview. I joke and tell Saroj that I lied and I have one more question. She laughs and says: "I'm used to lies." I ask her what she hopes will happen here in ten to fifteen years. She pauses to think for a while, then answers:

Well, there can be two points of view. My own selfish point of view would be just leave it alone. That's more of an idealistic, utopian [position], at this point, possibly. But at least that's how I still feel. I don't even like to see a boat on the water. It just looks like an invasion. Now, that's one side, but I do know that people want to have better jobs. The minimal number of Americans and tourists that have come here have tremendously improved the lifestyle of the local community. If you talk to Pablo, life [before the tourists began to arrive] was a time when all food [had] to come from local [sources]. I mean really there was one store run by the Montañeros in La Ribera if you could walk up there or find a donkey to get on to get up there. So for most people, their subsistence came from where they lived. And so a lot of battle cactus [check this phrasing] was harvested for the cattle, they made *dulce* from that. The only sweetening came from [honey]. Pablo and his brother Antonio are still good at tracking bees to their beehives – that was the only sweetening they had. All the rabbits were part of their meat, and of course fish for those who were near the seashore. And so that kind of subsistence [now she's referring to development and tourism] is going to improve their lives tremendously. The hospital in La Ribera has really helped a lot of people. But I think you can overdo that part and it's no longer—[she pauses]—a peaceful, utopian community. It will become driven by greed, and the rest that goes with it.

### **Conversations for the future**

Development is not a yes or no proposition. Development is one word, one concept that encompasses an astonishingly broad amount of meanings and understandings. It means fear, just as much as it means hope. It is about social well-being just as much as it is about greed and avarice. It's a word that we use to encompass personal and geographic histories, current social conditions, and future possibilities. It is like a linguistic cover letter that we use when we try to understand how people—and places—can go from one point to another. What these narratives show is that there's only so much one word or concept can manage, which is why we have to listen to stories and

take account of the *multiplicities of meaning* rather than just asking simple, polemic questions about whether or not people are for or against something as ubiquitous and multifaceted as the idea of development. We have to pay attention to where people place these ideas within the contexts of their lives.

Are people on the East Cape against development? Yes. Are they in favor of development? Yes, they are. Sometimes the same person expresses support for one aspect of development while also denouncing other aspects in the very next breath. Development is a process. A social process. It's something that has to be argued over, worked out, and, agreed upon. But the agreement doesn't always come. The meaning of development is personal and individual—based upon a person's upbringing, experiences, politics, and education. But development is not just an individual, atomistic process. There are also shared meanings that highlight its social, historical, and cultural roots. Development is one word we use to talk about processes of social and geographic change that are deeply layered, one atop another. Like an old Roman city, all human places have layers of meaning stacked one upon the other.

Development is a way for people to talk about the past, the present, and the future. Based upon my interviews, there are two very broad meanings that people attach to the concept of development: 1) Development in terms of *desarrollo* or social development; and 2) development as economic development (on the East Cape development in this sense basically refers to real estate and hotel development). Beneath those two broad categories, people expressed a wide range of opinions, expectations and hopes as to what development means to them. They talk of development in both positive and negative terms—about what the process can create, and what it can destroy. In general, when people talk about development in positive terms, they're talking mostly in the first sense: development as something that fosters community, jobs, and social betterment. When they speak of development in negative terms, it's in the second sense, but specifically in reference to mass tourism development—and how it might bring about the ruin of a place (whether this is due to increased crime, pollution, displacement, or overcrowding). Others acknowledge the potential economic benefits of development, but at smaller-scales. All of these development narratives are rooted in history, experience, values, politics, and interests.

What good comes from development? From Elisa to Bertha to Saroj to Angeles, many people talk about the possibility of jobs and economic opportunities. This is one, positive side of development that came up often during my interviews. Not just the false promise of jobs that often comes from developers, but the idea that development can entail community development or perhaps *social development*. This conception of development moves beyond simple economics and imagines development in terms of personal and community growth—the kind of learning that Alejandro mentions. This side of development often gets lost in the larger rhetorical battles that take place when economic development gets pitted against the health of the environment. But many people hold onto the idea that development can bring jobs, yes, but also schools, health clinics, and opportunities, as Elisa puts it, that allow people to develop themselves. This is the side of development that can all too easily gets lost in the shadows when economic indicators—and things like revenue—take precedence above all else. Development is a good, positive thing when its benefits find their way to local communities. But development can also instill reservations, if not outright fear.

Several people talked about the threat of outsiders: Angeles, George, Saroj, Bertha. Development is often framed in terms of us and them. It is a process that is often created by others, built by others, that benefits others. The land changes hands. Access is lost. Money flows to other places. The workers who come to build large scale developments become a major source of preoccupation. Looking at the *colonias* of Cancún or even Los Cabos, it's easy to see why. If Cabo Cortés did end up attracting 100,000 or 200,000 new workers, where would they live? What would they be like? This unknown population, which will be responsible for building the structures of new places, brings with it a whole slew of potential negative repercussions. Angeles speaks of people who will come in the night and literally steal the tranquility of Cabo Pulmo. This fear of crime—often coming from those migrants—is an especially common concern for many residents. Others I interviewed talked about losing the quality of life of the place, or the fact that they would no longer be able to leave their doors open at night. Interestingly these concerns over security parallel the ones articulated by tourists themselves—the fears of narcos or robberies that publications such as *Los Cabos Magazine* (described in Chapter 1) attempt to assuage.

Many of the people I talked with came to the East Cape—to places like Cabo Pulmo—because of an attraction to smaller communities. This was another one of the most common positive themes that came up during discussions about place and development. Many talked about wanting to find ways to keep life the way it is. As Saroj said, if she had her way the place would just stay the same. In fact, of the 39 expats that took the online survey, the most common response from people when I asked them about the future of the East Cape was that they didn't want it to change at all.

But that brings up another problem: development is almost intrinsically opposed to keeping places small because when people think of development, they think in terms of growth. This is the ever expanding development that Alejandro mentions. In all of my interviews, including the survey of 39 expats, the vast majority of people I spoke with were against Cabo Cortés. While some people expressed the sentiment that the project could be a good thing (this was rare), the overwhelming majority had negative reactions. The number one reason: because of the massive scale of the project. A development of 30,000 rooms is pretty much an automatic, instant threat to anyone who highly values their small, quaint, remote community. The negative response to Cabo Cortés was across the board—both Mexican and expats were against it.

Granted, not everyone was against Cabo Cortés and Cabo Riviera. This is a gap in my research, and it was partially due to the fact that my social contacts and networks were more closely linked with Cabo Pulmo, a place where the vast majority of residents were stridently against large-scale development. In fact, a significant percentage of people from La Ribera supported those two projects, primarily because they believed they would lead to future employment. I did conduct informal interview with several workers/residents of la Ribera, and every one of them expressed support for the two big development projects. The hope for jobs was the number one reason. However, as Bertha and Elisa point out, the promise of jobs is questionable. If the new developments on the East Cape follow the pattern set by Los Cabos and Cancún (and other places), then much of the employment will end up in the hands of people from other places. While I was on the East Cape, in fact, I saw evidence of the support for these projects eroding, especially due to the combined efforts of the La Ribera chapter of RARE and Cabo Pulmo's ACCP. During one meeting, after a series of presentations from marine biologists about the

importance of conservation and its effects on local fisheries outside the marine park, several fishermen stood up and shared their thoughts with the audience. They had changed their minds.

This is another key component of the meaning of development. It really is a matter of conversation—or, in some cases, a severe lack of conversation. As Serge Dedina, director of the conservation NGO Wild Coast told me, the Cancún-esque development model gets repeated again and again because that's the only model many people know or understand. This is especially the case, he explained, among government officials and many developers. They do things the way things have always been done—it's a sort of economic development model habitus, one that's hard to break. While Cancún may be a resounding success according to national economic indices, at the local, community level it's a disaster (see Castellanos 2010). This was a point that Alejandro—director of the Cabo Pulmo National Park—made quite well above. And yet, the show goes on. More of the same types of projects keep getting proposed—and granted permits to proceed. The development conversations that are taking place on the East Cape—right now—are all about questioning the models of the past, challenging what can or should be, and expressing what people want and expect from development. While the future of the East Cape may seem grim, the roads are still mostly unpaved, the coastline remains open, and possibilities for alternatives still exist.

Back in 1959 it was possible for the naturalist and writer Joseph Wood Krutch to speak of development as a series of failures and “almosts,” as he does in the epigraph to this chapter, but that's no longer the case today. Development has arrived on the peninsula, and the cape region is no exception. The Los Cabos tourism zone is one prime example of all the successes—and failures—that development can entail.

The East Cape appears to be the next on the chopping block of Mexico's tourism development policy, in which one place after another gets transformed into the next big—and indistinguishable—tourism destination. But a cacophony of voices—if they make themselves heard—might just be able to avoid that seemingly unavoidable future. The meaning of development is indeed a matter of layered histories, voices, and conversations. But it's also a matter of action, of not just what people say but what, in the

end, they actually do. The meaning of development is position and perspective dependent. The form that development takes, however, is ultimately political.

By focusing on the social realities of people who live and work on the East Cape, I gain insight into the meaning(s) of development on the East Cape. But those meanings and lived realities have to be set within wider political contexts in order to understand how certain development visions and values come to fruition. The difference between the East Cape as Cancún, part II and the East Cape as an alternative model for the future is, in the end, a matter of resources, politics, and action. Words inform our lives—our understandings of concepts such as development helps shape what we imagine it can be. Our understandings of these concepts—and experiences with them—influence how we respond to other's ideas and propositions about the future. Our knowledge shapes our preferences and our biases. But our actions are what transform words into concrete realities. On the East Cape, the development future lies in the hands of competing forces that have dramatically different ideas about what the place should become.

But the future of this place is not a foregone conclusion. The East Cape still holds the potential for something else, for something other than the model provided by well-known destinations such as Cancún and Los Cabos. Maybe, to put it Krutch's terms, the East Cape will benefit from another "failure," another "almost," in which everyone breathes a collective sigh of relief, realizing that exclusive resorts, crime, environmental degradation, dispossession, and social inequality are not, after all, the automatic, inescapable fallout we are all doomed to expect from the world of development. Maybe there actually is an alternative.



## **Chapter 4: A sustainable place**

*Always ask of any proposed change or innovation: What will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?*

-Wendell Berry, from “17 Rules for a sustainable local community.”

### **Saving Cabo Pulmo**

In the community of Cabo Pulmo, “sustainability” is a concept that flows through many conversations about the future. It’s one of those words you’ll hear used by just about everyone. If there’s one thing about the rhetoric of sustainability—at least during my fieldwork on the East Cape—it had an air of optimism attached to it. It’s a concept that has undeniably been adopted by power brokers, NGOs, academics, and even the Mexican government. It is a term that has been so thoroughly critiqued that it has seemingly lost its meaning. Yet, it has been embraced, reworked, and remade by various community members in and around Cabo Pulmo to mean something more, and different, than the science-based, rational management meanings behind the official definitions. Far from the cynical deconstructions of many academics and development experts, “sustainability,” for many people, seems to point to a more hopeful future. And that’s saying a lot, coming from the small, fiery little community of Cabo Pulmo, which has social history that’s worthy of a daytime soap opera. Sustainability is a concept that many people have grasped onto in their hope to avoid the disasters, dispossessions, and degradations of large-scale tourism development.

As described in previous chapters, before the 1980s, Cabo Pulmo used to be a small fishing community composed of just a handful of individuals, including a small number of expats from the United States. In those days, the two sides of the community had pretty good relationships. But that all started to change in the early 1970s when Dick Barrymore, a former ski-filmmaker from Idaho, purchased a large tract of land from the person he felt had the clearest land title. This sale resulted in an extended feud with the local Castro family, particularly Jesus Castro Fiol and his descendants, who felt that the land Barrymore had purchased was theirs. This long feud led to clashes, divisions, and factions that have persisted to the present day. Some members of the expat community

liken it to the famous “Hatfield and McCoy” feud that took place in mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The feud was somewhat ameliorated between 2010 and 2012 when the community banded together to fight against the proposed Cabo Cortés tourism development project described in the previous chapter. Slated to include approximately 30,000 rooms, multiple golf courses, seven thousand residential units, a separate worker city, a marina, and several hotels Cabo Cortés was, in short, a proposal for a new tourism city in the middle of an arid region in which the largest population is about 5,000 people (in the town of Los Barriles). Cabo Cortés was the epitome of *un-sustainability* in the eyes of many, and the threat of the project pushed the Hatfields and McCoys of Cabo Pulmo to set aside their differences—at least for a while—to fight the common enemy. All in the name of “saving Cabo Pulmo.”

### **Si se puede**

Today Cabo Pulmo is an internationally recognized destination for eco-tourists who want to see and experience the 20,000 year old reef that is the primary focus of local conservation efforts. The transition from fishing community to ecotourism destination has literally put Cabo Pulmo on the map, attracting more tourists, non-Mexican residents, and researchers—not to mention developers and investors—in the past decade. Therefore, rather than a large scale tourism city, many feel that Cabo Pulmo is the ideal site for a new, sustainable tourism model (see Gámez 2008; Gerber 2008; Gámez and Montaña 2004).

The development of the Cabo Pulmo National Park (CPNP) took time. It was not an instant success. The park itself was formally created in 1995, but the early years were fraught with a range of conflicts and logistical problems (see Weiant 2005). One of the main issues was a certain amount of resistance to the park itself when it was first created. This resistance came from local members of the Mexican community, and from the expats who also call Cabo Pulmo home. Success was a long time coming, but it did come: the CPNP experienced a 463% increase in biomass from 1999 to 2009 (Aburto et al. 2011). The news of this success led to a flurry of media and news reports that hailed

Cabo Pulmo as one of Mexico's most successful conservation efforts (e.g. Lee 2011; Scripps 2011; Delsol 2012).

While the park itself has achieved recent successes, the *community* of Cabo Pulmo has been left somewhat on the backburner. The park gets both national and international support and attention, but residents still completely lack basic resources such as public water infrastructure, power, health services, schools, and even clearly defined public spaces (see Gámez and Montaña 2004; Gerber 2008). The roads are unpaved. The nearest health clinic is at least 30 minutes away—and longer if the roads are washed out. There was a small elementary school a few years back, but it was destroyed in 2005 when hurricane John swept through the peninsula. All that remains is an empty, forlorn concrete shell out on Cabo Pulmo point. There is a pre-school, but the rest of the kids take a 40 minute bus ride into the neighboring pueblo of La Ribera. As for water, while the expats have plenty (although it's not cheap), the Mexican community has been fighting to make the government finally build reliable water infrastructure. Community development lags far behind the state-backed development of the national park. Some members of the community, however, are pushing back.

Judith Castro is the president of Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP), the community-based conservation organization first mentioned in the introduction. She is one of the most active members of ACCP, focusing much of her energies on preserving Pulmo reef. But her efforts are not just directed at environmental conservation. She also spends a great deal of time trying to promote and foster community development in Cabo Pulmo. When she talks about community development, she talks in terms of *sustainable development*.

"The park is a success," she tells me, "but the community is what needs a lot of support now." Judith explains that the community of Cabo Pulmo needs a lot of support to deal with and adjust to the growing tourism market. They need training, customer service skills, and certifications... but they also need adequate infrastructure for the community itself. Basic things like lights on the streets, she tells me. Then Judith brings up Cabo Pulmo's community development plan, which was devised with the assistance of Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) through a series of community meetings, training sessions, and presentations.

“We have a sustainable development project we’re working on here,” Judith explains. The idea is to make Cabo Pulmo into a “sanctuary of sea, land, and people,” and a “destination that’s truly ecological, authentic, and rustic.” This is the slogan that the community of Cabo Pulmo came up with during their work with DAI. “It sounds very good,” Judith tells me, “but it’s going to require a lot of work, a lot of support, and a lot of effort to bring everyone together.” The project, she says, is about what the community members of Cabo Pulmo want for themselves” “What is it that *we* want for Cabo Pulmo?” The whole idea, she says, is that “we ourselves—the inhabitants of Cabo Pulmo—decide what we want...or how we want to develop Cabo Pulmo.”

Judith then brings up the fight against Cabo Cortés, which was going to be built about 10 kilometers from Cabo Pulmo (see Greenpeace 2008). Between 2010 and mid-2012, the community of Cabo Pulmo, in partnership with a broad coalition of national and international groups, waged an extensive social and media campaign against Cabo Cortés. At the time, Judith said, “Our fight is against the *scale* of that project. It’s a project that’s too big, and it’s not something that’s needed in this area.” Cabo Cortés, she told me, would kill the reef at Cabo Pulmo. The community development plan is all about finding an alternative to that future.

“So our plan is for Cabo Pulmo to offer a vision of sustainable development. Not just in Cabo Pulmo but in the whole area.” This is going to require a broad community pact, or agreement, she explains. Cabo Pulmo, in her view, needs to agree on an image for the community—what kinds of lights, fences, colors, and buildings they want to see in the future. But they also need a school, a health clinic, and infrastructure for potable water. “We suffer a lot from this lack of water,” she points out. Judith continues, telling me that the community needs to decide if they want solar power or “normal” power, and how all of these things are going to happen without negatively affecting the image of the community itself. They need an image, she says, along with training for those who work in tourism, and education for the children. They need to do everything they can to make Cabo Pulmo

*the* destination, not just another place, but the tourism destination of excellence that *is sustainability*. Like I said, it sounds very beautiful, but it's going to require a lot of work and commitment. From everyone who lives there. It's not going to be easy...but we have to believe *si se puede* (yes you can).

For Judith and the community of Cabo Pulmo, sustainability is all about local control, participation, and empowerment. It's everything that Cabo Cortés—and massive tourism destinations like Los Cabos—never were. It's one word that encapsulates a wide-ranging, optimistic hope about the future. But what does it mean? In the next section I'll begin to trace out an understanding of the concept of sustainable development through the critical lens of political ecology.

### **Political ecology and sustainable development**

As explored in the previous chapter, the concept of development is complex, often convoluted, and laden with many meanings (see Edelman and Haugerud 2007; Escobar 1995, 2008; Hart and Payadachee 2010; Gardner and Lewis 1996). Development is either a descriptive label for broad, global social changes, or a prescriptive label for how such changes should—according to various perspectives—take place (Adams 2007:6). Development can be seen as a way of improving the world (e.g. Sen 1999), dominating it through hegemonic discourses (e.g. Escobar 1995), or providing for the basic human needs of communities (e.g. Hart and Payadachee 2010). The meaning of *sustainable* development, then, is highly dependent upon the form of development that's being sustained. In general, sustainable development speaks to the question of development as it relates to the environment (Adams 2007:22). Therefore, sustainable development can mean everything from the mitigation of environmental issues in order to permit continued economic growth and expansion, or, at the other end of the spectrum, a privileging of “basic human needs” (Watts and Peet 2004:xvi).

As Adams explains, the history of sustainable development is closely linked with wider histories of Western environmentalism and conservation (2007:6). After World War II, rising populations became an increasingly important concern for the United Nations and many international science organizations (Neumann 2005:84). By the late 1960s, the “under-developed” nations of the world were increasingly “managed” by western scientists who were primarily concerned with natural resources on a global scale. This was also a period that witnessed the birth of a wider environmental movement that was based upon concerns about resource depletion, pollution, and the threat of overpopulation (see Adams 2007:45). The 1972 UN Conference on the Human

Environment resulted in an increasing focus on the relationships between “rational” natural resource management, economic growth and development in under-developed nations, and population growth (Neumann 2005:84).

The concept of sustainable development is rooted in earlier ecological ideas such as the “ecosystem,” the “equilibrium” and the concept of “maximum sustainable yield” (Adams 2007:39-40). Nature was seen as a kind of self-regulating machine that was all too easily knocked off balance by “inappropriate” human activities. While humans could upset the beautiful machine of nature, they could, according to the thinking of the time, also intervene (via science) and help set it right (Adams 2007:40).

The first attempt to codify the concept of sustainability took place in 1980 through the publication of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS).<sup>26</sup> The concept was brought to the “political mainstream” in *Our Common Future*, a report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Bruntland Commission (Neumann 2005:84; Adams 2007:54). This report contained the most commonly used definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (in Neumann 2005:84). This definition is sufficiently broad, open-ended, and full of assumptions as to invite a plethora of interpretations, applications, and practices (see Redclift 2005 for a critical review of the concept since the Bruntland Commission).

One of the core components of the growing concept of sustainability was the idea that *poverty* is a fundamental cause of environmental degradation. Poverty reduction, therefore, was seen as a critical imperative in order to ameliorate or halt continued damage to natural resources and the environment as a whole. While this rationale had tremendous appeal for “development populists” in the 1970s, it was also attractive to large institutions like the World Bank. Why? By making poverty reduction via economic development the primary strategy, sustainable development became a rhetorical and policy-based vehicle that effectively transformed *the problem* into the *cure*.

Political ecology arose in the 1980s as a critique to “mainstream” sustainable development (Neumann 2005:85). It came about in the midst of a clash between the

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<sup>26</sup> As Neumann (2005:84) explains, this was a combined effort that included the UN Environment Programme, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the World Wildlife Fund.

“development populism” of the 1970s and the “neoliberalism” of the 1980s (see also Peet and Watts 2004; Robbins 2004). Development populism centered on the basic idea that “small is beautiful,” emphasizing the rural, the local, and the small-scale as key foci for improving the lives of so-called “Third World” peoples (Neumann 2005:85). It was a challenge to and critique of modernization theory and top down development. Development populists argued that communities and individuals could do development better. Neoliberal economists, development experts, and policymakers agreed—but for some very different reasons.

According to neoliberal theory, the state is an inefficient, if not corrupt, barrier to progress. Economists and planners influenced by these ideas began to tout the value and importance of individuals and local communities. In this thinking, the idea is to sweep the state and all government intervention aside, allowing the market and an idealistic population of rational individuals to do the heavy lifting, turning development models into successful free-market realities. During the 1980s, the state was in fact pushed aside (via, for examples, structural adjustment policies in Mexico), leading to the rise of a plethora of grassroots organizations and NGOs that took the helm of global development. Local “communities” became central to development for just about every development institution at this time (Neumann 2005:86). For powerful institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which focused on broad reductions in state expenditures, “designating local people as development experts made for good fiscal policy” (Neumann 2005:86). Locals appealed to the IMF and other free-market advocates of the 1980s because they were cheap. One of the main problems with neoliberal conceptions of communities is that they are not, in fact, homogenous collections of rational, like-thinking individuals. This is why some of the early community-based conservation and development efforts ended up mired in intractable political struggles—to the consternation of the free-market neoliberals.

My use of political ecology focuses, first, on this problem of community. Political ecologists argue for the importance of community and the need to critically rethink what community can mean in different contexts (see Neumann 2005; Watts and Peet 2004:24). While many development experts, drawing from neoclassical economic theory, assume that local communities are homogenous social bodies that all share the same basic

information about the world around them (in order to calculate decisions, costs, and benefits), political ecologists see local communities as *political entities* full of an array of internal divisions, differences, and interests. Unlike the implicit assumptions in rational choice theory, political ecologists do not assume that all individuals in a given community have access to or knowledge of the same information. Community is a vital concern for political ecologists because it is a site of knowledge production and regulation, identity, tradition, governance, and resistance all at once. It is also a potential locus of “alternative visions of development” (Watts and Peet 2004:24).

The undeniable internal divisions within communities make it necessary to render the idea of community in political and ethnographic terms (Watts and Peet 2004:25; see also Bryant 1991). As Neumann explains, local knowledge is “extensive” but “distributed unevenly within communities” (2005:88). Within each community, different factions compete with one another to position themselves as the face, voice, or representative of the community as a whole. The end result: these factions end up promoting and supporting the interests of some members, at the expense of others, while claiming to speak for everyone (Neumann 2005:91). Because of these uneven and selective claims, Watts and Peet encourage us to think of communities in terms of competing “hegemonies” that attempt to speak for the interest of the community as a whole. If we think about communities in terms of hegemonies, the question of sustainability should make us critically question *whose* long-term interests are being served through sustainable development (Redclift 2005). These considerations are directly applicable to Cabo Pulmo, which is rife with factions, disputes, and competing claims about who is and *who is not* part of the community. Conservation is both a means for rallying support and a way to make claims to place. The notion of community is also a battleground for discussing, disputing, and debating control and access of various forms of property (Watts and Peet 2004:25).

Land ownership is a second issue that I address through a political ecology framework. As with the issue of community, land ownership is undeniably political as well. The question of who owns the land is key for any viable form of sustainable development, especially since the right to develop (land, place) often comes hand in hand with associated (and demonstrable) legal claims to land. It would be difficult to claim a



sustainable future in a place where land access and/or rights are insecure, but this is exactly what is happening in Cabo Pulmo today. For this reason, the structure of property rights and how this relates to resource access and land is of utmost importance.

As Neumann explains “The question of who controls access is a critical one in analysing who participates in, gains from, or is excluded from the process of development” (2005:102). Privatization is one of the biggest issues throughout the Baja peninsula, as exemplified in places such as Ensenada, Los Cabos, and even La Paz where development often leads to either the displacement or exclusion of local people. Following on the heels of Hardin’s Tragedy of the Commons thesis, institutions such as the World Bank have promulgated the formalization of land tenure through titling and surveys in the name of creating “security” for long-term investment (Neumann 2005:103). Similar thinking drove the Mexican government to push for surveys and land titling in the East Cape region starting in the early 1970s. What political ecologists have shown is that many of these policies have unintended consequences (Neumann 2005:103).

Closely intertwined with the twin concerns of community and land ownership is the question of how sustainable development addresses (or eludes) the issue of *social reproduction*. The concept of social reproduction has been used in political ecological studies of health and food/water security (e.g. Richter and Weiland 2011; Jackson and Neely 2014; Nichols 2014). As discussed in Chapter 1, Marx’s ultimate argument about capitalism is that the production of things ends up dominating the production of people. Hart (2011:5) discusses the idea that the economy was originally meant as a means to “reproduce human life and whatever sustains it.” Marx’s theoretical goal in much of his work was to reverse the “subordination of people to things” (Hart 2011:8).

When it comes to sustainable development—and sustainable *tourism* development in the case of Cabo Pulmo—the question is whether the turn to the tourism economy results in a mere servicing of market needs, or whether it results in actual changes and patterns that promote, support, and maintain community health and vitality in a long-term sense. In places such as Cancún, Huatulco, and Los Cabos, the interests of people are all too often subordinated to the production of desirable, sellable tourism destinations (Hiernaux 1999; Madsen 2000; Lopez et al. 2006; Wilson 2008; Gámez and Ganster

2012). This too must be reversed, if the concept of sustainability is to have any meaning at all.

### **Los Cabos as unwanted future**

The optimism and hope that many have for Cabo Pulmo comes, in part, from the disappointments and failures of the traditional “sun and sea” destinations that dominated Mexico’s tourism development in the past. Mexico’s centrally-planned tourism “poles”, which were brought online starting in the 1970s (see Clancy 2001), undoubtedly generated revenue, investment, growth, and rising economic indices, but, as previously discussed, they also came with a wide range of social, economic, and environmental costs (Lopez et al. 2006; Wilson 2008; Gámez 2008; Gámez 2012; Hierneaux 1999; Castellanos 2010). Los Cabos is one well-known, nearby example in which locals can see both the successes and failures of the “traditional,” mass-tourism models that have dominated Mexico’s recent development history.

In 2009, *National Geographic Traveler* ranked Los Cabos as “one of the worst tourism destinations in the world” (Gámez 2012:216). The rating was based upon criteria that include environmental, aesthetic, and cultural factors, including the “future prospects” of a destination (Gámez 2012:216). The downsides of the successes of Los Cabos also include land dispossession, socio-economic segregation, and extensive urban *colonias* with tremendously lower standards of living than the tourism zones (see Wilson 2008; Lopez et al. 2006). As Gámez (2008:20) argues, development in Los Cabos did not adequately address how urban and touristic pressures would impact the natural and social resources of the region. Primary concerns include environmental degradation, public health and safety, loss of local identity, and threats to sovereignty—the last issue particularly because of the increase of foreign residents, tourism businesses, and real estate businesses (Gámez 2008:20; see also Cabral 1998; Lopez et al. 2006). These failures of Los Cabos—perceived and real—reverberate through the social order and influence how residents of Los Cabos think about the future, and about development.

During my research, when the subject of Los Cabos came up, people often used it to talk about why they ended up on the East Cape, or what they hoped would not happen there. San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas used to be small, coastal communities

much like La Ribera and Cabo Pulmo are today. The lack of development and isolation attracted a certain type of tourist in those days. But as Los Cabos grew into an increasingly larger and more developed international tourism zone in the 1980s and 1990s, some people who were initially drawn began to look elsewhere. I mention this pattern of out-migration when I shared the stories of Dave, Ann, and Betty in the introduction. To recap, Dave and Ann fell in love with Cabo San Lucas when they first arrived in the late 1970s—because it was just a small community. When tourism developed took off, they found their way to La Ribera. Betty, another resident of La Ribera, had a similar experience. She left Los Cabos because it was too crowded and “touristy,” and because she wanted to experience life in a small Mexican town.

As explored in Chapter 2, many expats are drawn to the East Cape specifically because it’s not developed like Los Cabos. When the subject of Los Cabos comes up, many expats talk about the crime, crowds, tourists, noise, pollution, and traffic. For many—but certainly not all—expats on the East Cape, Los Cabos stands as a symbol of the kind of development they don’t want to see happen where they live.<sup>27</sup> They find their way to the East Cape for a variety of personal, financial, and/or aesthetic reasons.

James,<sup>28</sup> a US citizen, first came down to the cape region of Baja more than forty years ago. When I asked him why he bought property on the East Cape, he said it was because of his: “love of the land” and the “intrinsic beauty and value of the place.” He said that places like Cabo San Lucas are completely “out of control” and “exaggerated” models of development. “I think that’s really poor development,” he explained. “Mexico means well, but executes poorly.”

Negative or skeptical views about Los Cabos are not limited to the expats, however. Many of the Mexican residents in the region also express concerns and critical views about the development and urbanization of the Los Cabos tourism zone. Angeles, the manager of La Palapa in Cabo Pulmo, questions projects like “Cabo Cortés” because Los Cabos isn’t even close to full capacity. “They aren’t filling up the hotels in Los Cabos,” she explained, “so why would we want more hotel rooms? And why would we

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<sup>27</sup> This could be another form of “Not in my backyard” (NIMBY) politics, however, since many expats who live out on the East Cape often travel to the Los Cabos tourism zone for groceries and other services. Some residents on the East Cape told me they think Los Cabos has been positive overall for the region, but they do not want to live there.

<sup>28</sup> Pseudonym.

want a city right next to us?” This argument—which is expressed by many residents of the East Cape, questions the logic of expanding development when the tourism zone at Los Cabos isn’t even full. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Angeles also expresses her worries about what would happen if a large development project was built next to Cabo Pulmo. She worries about security—and about water. As with many others, for Angeles, Los Cabos is an important reference point she uses to gauge her understandings of the risks and benefits of development. It’s a vision of one possible future. A vision many residents of the East Cape reject.

The reasons for this rejection are many. Judith Castro speaks of the “*cordones de miseria*” that ring the Los Cabos tourism corridor. These are the places where workers, squatters, and migrants from other parts of Mexico land in their quest to find employment in the tourism economy. These people live in dramatically different conditions than the bright, luxurious, air-conditioned hotels that dominate the coastline (see Lopez et al. 2006; Castellanos 2010; Madsen Camacho, 2000). “There are many people who live in that area who don’t have water,” Judith said. “They live in *Los Cabos*, one of the most famous tourism spots in the world, and they don’t have water, they don’t have health services--this is ironic...and the developers don’t see all of this, or if they do see it, they close their eyes.”

Dissatisfaction with Los Cabos is not just due to the crowds, the scale of development, the drained aquifers or the lack of basic resources and services for many who live on the outskirts of the tourism center. It’s also about exclusion—a lack of access to the social world that has been created in Los Cabos. It’s a world made for some, barring others (Saragoza 2010; Lopez et al. 2006). As my earlier discussion about community highlights, communities are often fraught with divisions and inequalities. The development of Los Cabos came with many promises about jobs and employment opportunities. Those narratives drew migrants from other parts of Mexico who were in search of a better life. But these hopes don’t always become a reality.

Oscar, the organic produce vendor introduced in the last chapter, spoke eloquently of the problems that would result from the planned Cabo Cortés development. The big issue, he explained, is that places become inaccessible: “In San Lucas it used to be really beautiful ... but now you can’t access [the coast]—it’s all closed off ... People talk about

progress and jobs, but it hasn't really happened. Los Cabos used to be affordable and cheap, but not now. *De hecho, Cabo San Lucas es un cochinerito*" [In fact, Cabo San Lucas is a mess]". But he wasn't just talking about the physical closure of spaces, although that is indeed part of what's happening there, as formerly public beaches become de facto private spaces. Oscar also talked about social exclusion. In another conversation, he recounted times when people did not want to serve him in restaurants in Los Cabos, and cases in which he was not allowed to access beaches and the marina. There's a lot of racism out there, he told me.

Oscar is not an isolated case. Early in 2012 I met a young marine biology student, Gabriel. We were talking about the privatization of the coastline, and how Mexican law states that the ocean and beaches (in the "Federal Zone") must be open to the public. But this isn't always the case, I said, and sometimes exclusion is reinforced through informal social practices. I told Gabriel that hotels will often let me pass through their gates to "have a look around" because I look like another tourist. Or, because I'm a white man who looks like he's from the United States. Gabriel didn't look surprised at all, and told me he has been blocked from passing through a hotel to get to the beach more than once. He thinks it's because of how he looks. The color of his skin.

Gabriel's comments reminded me of a trip I made to the hotel zone in Los Cabos when I was just starting my research. Some of our family came down to Baja to visit and had access to a timeshare in Los Cabos; my wife and I agreed to meet them out there. We'd already spent a lot of time out on the East Cape, so the transition from the dirt roads to the madness of Los Cabos was a slight shock. We stayed at the hotel for a couple of days, and one of the first things that struck both of us was how expensive everything was. As of 2013, the minimum wage for BCS was about 65 pesos per day, which is about five US dollars (Mennem 2012). According to the ICF, most workers in the state (as of 2006) earned about two or three times the minimum wage, which would be about ten or fifteen dollars per day (ICF 2006). If this estimate is accurate, this means that a significant portion of the working population makes approximately 240 to 360 US dollars per month. The low end hotels in the zone cost approximately 200-300 pesos per night (15-23 US dollars), while the higher end hotels in Los Cabos start around 100 USD per

night and go as high as 600 USD (the latter is a quote for the Hacienda Beach Club & Residences).

Hotels are just one indication of the high costs of staying in the Los Cabos tourism zone. The place where we stayed cost over 100 USD per night, and it wasn't a particularly "luxurious" hotel. The mere prices of rooms, food, and activities served to limit who could access these places. These spaces are built for foreign tourists with access to cash or credit. But money isn't the only limiting factor—people are also allowed in or kept out based upon what they look like. The beach is one place where this form of segregation plays out in public view.

When I went to walk down to the beach during our stay, one of the hotel staff kindly informed me that the beach in front of the hotel was for guests only. He also gave me a gentle warning about staying away from the public beach, located about a half mile south. Once I made it down the steps, I saw the beach itself. There were chairs and umbrellas, all encircled by a rope enclosure—marking the exclusive space of the hotel. Just outside the ropes, Mexican vendors tried to sell hats, watches and other trinkets to anyone who would listen to them. Most people, I noticed, just didn't look at the vendors. The awkward border between hotel space and Other space made for quiet tensions. There were no signs that said "poor Mexicans keep out," but the social order—and the practices of hotel staff—made that rule quite apparent. Yet another *de facto* arrangement. This kind of not-so-subtle exclusion reverberates all along the Los Cabos corridor.

Back in 2009 I talked with social activist, Julieta, who was in the middle of a fight to keep the beaches at Palmilla hotel, in Los Cabos, open to the public. It was a fight against people who wanted to redevelop the area and kick local fishermen off the beach. In Los Cabos, the issue of public access to local beaches is recurrent problem. It's a common issue all throughout Mexico, especially in places with large-scale coastal development (e.g. Cancún, the Maya Riviera, and Huatulco). According to Mexican law, hotel owners and developers are required to provide free public access to beaches.<sup>29</sup> The problem, as one local journalist put it, is that actual enforcement of the federal law takes a

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<sup>29</sup> See the Diario Oficial de la Federación (DOF) 8/21/1991: Reglamento para el Uso y Aprovechamiento del Mar territorial, vías navegables, Playas, Zona Federal Marítimo Terrestre y Terrenos ganados al mar.

long time, often doesn't happen at all, and, if it does happen, rarely carries any weight (Zarza 2013).

The project at Palmilla, Julieta told me, was "severely limiting access and trying to remove fishermen who have been using the beach for fifty years." Fishermen are often targets for removal because they don't fit the aesthetic ideals of high end hotels. They ruin the view, upset the pristine myth that people want to attach to the landscape. "In ten years," Julieta said, "our way of life will be lost; the development process is changing and erasing our culture." She talked about how so many Americans are coming down and buying up land in Baja, but many of them don't want the Mexicans around. "They don't want us up there [in the US], ok that's fine. But they don't want us here either? Where are we supposed to go?"

Julieta's pointed questions are part of a wider social critique about the path of development in Los Cabos. These critiques raise important concerns about the perceived social, cultural, and economic failures of a place that's still considered a rousing success at the national level. While Los Cabos has undoubtedly created economic opportunities and investment, it has also come with a heavy social price tag. What many residents hope for—and speak out about—is an alternative future that leads them away from the Los Cabos model. This also brings us back to the question of community. Julieta's story paints Los Cabos as a place created for others, not for local residents like herself.

"Sustainable development" is that alternative for many residents of the region. The language of sustainability strongly informs and influences local ideas about what development can—or should—look like. It's a word that has been hijacked, reworked, and remade to take on—and speak to—a tremendous range of local issues and meanings. This was apparent during a community meeting I attended in May 2012 in Cabo Pulmo. The meeting was hosted by DAI—Development Alternatives Inc.—a group that was working with the community of Cabo Pulmo to create a sustainable development plan. The DAI staff opened the meeting with a question about what people liked most about Cabo Pulmo. There were varied responses. Some talked about kayaking, or the fact that dogs can run free on the beaches; others mentioned the starry night sky. Yet another person said that Cabo Pulmo is a "sanctuary with a unique group of people that must be preserved" and a representation of "hope that we can come up with a sensible plan to

preserve this place.” Then one woman raised her hand and said “I love Cabo Pulmo, especially compared to what happened in Cabo San Lucas.” This started a quick tumble of responses. For example, one woman explained how she likes the fact that Cabo Pulmo has no high rise buildings. Yet another woman chimed in: “Cabo Pulmo means hope,” adding that in her view the DAI plan is all about “creating an alternative to the kind of development that has happened in Los Cabos.”

“The goal of DAI,” said one of the staff members, “is to avoid the Cabo San Lucas of the world.” Cabo Pulmo, for some, is the staging ground of possibility where that might just happen. Sustainable development is the plan—the hopeful idea—for getting this done. “Sustainability” seems to take on an almost magical quality.

### **Cabo Pulmo: potential and problems**

The question, asks Alba Gámez (2008:13), is whether or not “tourism growth in Baja California Sur will correspond with the idea of sustainability.” Gámez defines sustainability as the foundation of *alternative* tourism (e.g. adventure tourism, ecotourism, and rural tourism activities), which ideally promotes conservation, respect for natural and cultural resources, and regional development options that result in employment opportunities and benefits for local communities (2008:12).

Cabo Pulmo, Gámez argues, is one example of the potential of a new, alternative tourism development model for Baja California Sur (and Mexico as a whole). “Thanks to the reef and its landscape, Cabo Pulmo has great potential for alternative tourism,” she writes (2008:14). Besides the tourists who travel to Cabo Pulmo as their primary destination, the site also draws additional visitors because of its relative proximity to the Los Cabos tourism corridor. The primary focus of the businesses in Cabo Pulmo is undoubtedly on providing tourism services, including kayaking, snorkeling, hiking, fishing trips, and whale watching. Most of the tourists are foreigners (primarily from the US), and this has resulted in elevated prices for tourism services, restaurants, and lodging in Cabo Pulmo (Gámez 2008:15). There is money to be made. The recent, widely publicized success of the national park, in conjunction with national and international media attention from the campaign against Cabo Cortés, has also contributed to the reputation—and potential—of Cabo Pulmo as a prime tourism destination.



This potential, however, has some serious roadblocks. One is the fact that the Mexican population in Cabo Pulmo has experienced demographic decline over the past decade. It's already a very small community, but there is a slight pattern of outmigration among the Mexican residents. In 2000, the number of Mexican residents was approximately 71 (INEGI 2000), and by 2005 that number dropped to 58 (INEGI 2005). The number dropped further in 2010 to 50 (INEGI 2010). Gámez pinpointed one of the major reasons behind this: the younger population tends to leave Cabo Pulmo for school, or to find work. This resonates with Pedro's views, described in Chapter one.

Population decline is just one of several critical issues, however. The lack of infrastructure, mentioned above, may be attractive to some of the tourists who visit Cabo Pulmo (it is), but it also presents challenges for those trying to turn the destination into a viable community with dependable employment opportunities. Beyond the water issue, and the lack of paved roads, there are issues with power. As Saroj explained in the previous chapter, the expats predominantly rely on solar power, using gas-powered generators as backups. The Mexican residents, on the other hand, are almost completely dependent upon the gas generators. One of the main reasons for this is economic: the initial investment costs for a solar powered system are at least 10,000 USD.<sup>30</sup> The Mexican residents simply cannot afford that kind of investment. Many of the Mexican residents want paved roads and municipal power. Many of the expats, however, do not want to see paved roads, or power, since they think it would ruin the beauty and appeal of Cabo Pulmo. This tension between the maintenance of a community and the development of a tourism destination leads to complex, conflicted desires. Daniel, a fisherman who has lived in Cabo Pulmo for more than a decade, sums up many of these problems in a few short, terse lines:

The Mexicans here, we are fucked because there is no power. We also need to put in a road. But that could bring more people who could rob and steal from us. It could bring people who would leave a lot of trash. We could use a school here, a health clinic, there are 20 kids here. And there's no police. If there's a problem we

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<sup>30</sup> I checked price quotes from various online sources (e.g. <http://michaelbluejay.com/electricity/solar.html>; <http://www.wholesalesolar.com/solar-cost.html>; and <http://solarpowerauthority.com/how-much-does-it-cost-to-install-solar-on-an-average-us-house/>). The starting prices begin at 10,000 USD and go up from there. Many of the expats who install solar actually buy much of the equipment in the US and then drive it down to BCS to install. Because of Mexico's import taxes, this is by far the cheapest way route for setting up a solar power system.

have to go all the way to La Ribera, and they could be asleep or eating some tacos.

As if that's not enough, Gámez points out even more issues that stand in the way of the development of a tourism-based, sustainable economy: "The low level of knowledge about the potential market, administration, forms of commercialization for tourism products, and access to finance and training are some of the most relevant problems" (Gámez 2008: 21; see also Gámez and Montaña 2004:5). Still, despite all of these challenges, the community of Cabo Pulmo is in fact transitioning from a fishing and ranching economy to a tourism economy.

Cabo Pulmo has many elements that make it a possible site for successful transition to a tourism-based economy. It has the beautiful, open desert landscape. It is uncrowded. There are still plenty of places where people can go to be away from the crowds that plague Los Cabos. There's the park. The place itself has a small, rustic, off-the-grid feel to it. Perhaps some sort of sustainable development is possible there. Despite all the problems—of infrastructure, financing, training, and knowledge—maybe it is indeed possible to transform Cabo Pulmo into a renowned model of sustainable development. Much of this depends, however, on the internal politics of the community itself.

### **Who can claim Cabo Pulmo?**

Who is the community? That's the big question in Cabo Pulmo. Who counts? Whose voice(s) should be heard? Who should have a vote, a say in what "development" looks like in the near future? This whole problem was highlighted in early 2012 when a group called "Pacific Voyagers" literally sailed into Cabo Pulmo. Well, they actually landed in the harbor at Cabo San Lucas and drove out to Cabo Pulmo, but it was close enough. Pacific Voyagers was a diverse collection of Native Pacific Island people, activists, scientists, and volunteers who were sailing around the world in double-hulled canoes (without instruments) to raise awareness about the ocean and global environmental issues. In 2010, the Pacific Voyagers finished construction of seven "Vaka Moana," traditionally-inspired canoes meant to represent different Pacific island nations. The Pacific Voyagers sailed from Aotearoa, New Zealand to Hawaii, then to the west coast of the United States before completing their journey in July 2012 in the Solomon

Islands. Along the way, they stopped in Cabo Pulmo in February 2012.<sup>31</sup> The Pacific Voyagers came to Cabo Pulmo because of its growing international reputation as a conservation success story. For at least some members of the crew, Cabo Pulmo was a success story that demonstrates what happens when people change their ways.<sup>32</sup>

When the Pacific Voyagers arrived, they were greeted by the “local community” of Cabo Pulmo. I highlight this event as a way to discuss the meaning—and perhaps “performance” of—the idea of community. This meeting was a clear instance in which one faction of Cabo Pulmo cast itself as “the community” to a group of outsiders, with the intention of speaking for the rest of the residents. In this case, it was ACCP and the Castro family that served as the representatives of Cabo Pulmo, an act that helped legitimate Cabo Pulmo’s cause and the Castro/ACCP claim to place all at the same time.

When the crew arrived, they performed a formal greeting and dance derived from the Maori tradition. Next they presented Judith with a small replica canoe and flag as gifts. In return, the residents of Pulmo had to scramble to put something together for a return gift. During this meeting it was quite apparent that the Pacific Voyager crew was far more experienced with these kinds of situations and interactions. After the gift exchange, PV representatives showed a short clip about their voyage up to that point, which was primarily a compilation of footage from all of the places they had visited. In return, representatives from ACCP shared a short slide show about Cabo Pulmo. The introduction featured pictures of the residents of Cabo Pulmo—the vast majority were from the Castro family. The slide show also told the story of about the people of Cabo Pulmo made a change from fishing to ecotourism.

One faction of the Castro family, which is the dominant *local* force behind Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP) and many of the conservation efforts in Cabo Pulmo became the de facto representatives of Cabo Pulmo. They told their story via images of Castro family members and narratives about their familial past in Cabo Pulmo. These stories go back to the founding figure of Jesus Castro Fiol, who, according to some, inherited all of the land when Meri Montaña, the original land owner, passed away in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Castro family, often through ACCP,

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about the Pacific Voyagers, check this site: <http://pacificvoyagers.org/history-of-pacific-voyagers-charitable-trust/>

<sup>32</sup> See this post on the Pacific Voyagers website: <http://pacificvoyagers.org/a-story-in-vienna/>

frequently casts themselves as the community of Cabo Pulmo, not only at this particular event, but in many other instances. In the fight against Cabo Cortés, for example, ACCP and certain members of the Castro family became the outspoken representatives and voices of Cabo Pulmo, gaining national and international media attention.

This performance of community, however, was missing certain elements. One of the most blatant, of course, was the expat community. While ACCP portrays the community of Cabo Pulmo as small, rural, local, and indigenous, the community is actually a complicated admixture of residents that includes people with deep familial roots, recent Mexican migrants such as the men and women who work for the Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, and expats who have been living there since the 1970s. This diverse face of Cabo Pulmo didn't see the light of day, however. For many events, like the meeting with the Pacific Voyagers, the members of the Castro faction strategically frame themselves as the community. By framing themselves as the locals, ACCP and the Castro family create a "vocabulary of legitimation" (Li 1996:503 in Neumann 2005:89) that serves to defend and protect their rights, voices, and interests in Cabo Pulmo. This strategy has proven quite effective, but it's not without its problems.<sup>33</sup>

The main problem, of course, is that many voices are left out. Granted, Cabo Pulmo is small community, but there are still factions, even within the two primary families (the Castros and the Cañedos) who have the deepest connections to the place. There are even small divisions within the Castro family itself, as I learned during various community events on different sides of the pueblo. Some people attend events on the "Castro" side of Cabo Pulmo, some don't. The reverse is also true.

The expats are another issue altogether. The social, geographic, and cultural segregation between the Mexican and the expat sides of the community are undeniable. Most of the expats live in one of three development "phases" of the Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, the project started by Dick Barrymore in the 1980s. A few expats live in "Cabo Pulmo Norte," which is really just a small collection of some of the earliest houses built by the non-Mexican residents. The majority of the Mexicans live in the Castro side of the

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<sup>33</sup> There is a reason behind this, as Neumann explains: "The romanticized images that political ecologists have so convincingly deconstructed may operate as powerful imagery that indigenous peasant communities can strategically deploy to defend land rights and customary resource access against external assaults" (2005:89).

pueblo, located on the south side. Members of the Cañedo family live in a couple of different households on the north and south sides of the community. There is not a lot of interaction between the different factions of the community, especially between the expats and the Mexicans. The expats stay in their part of Cabo Pulmo, in their own social networks, and the Mexicans in theirs. Most interaction takes place in restaurants, in tourism settings (like the dive shops), and occasionally in one of the two small grocery stores. As, Elisa explained in the previous chapter, there really is no official, open public space in Cabo Pulmo, since all of the land is private—and expensive.

These divisions become most apparent during social and community-based events that are designed to bring the various factions together. For example, the DAI meetings were an attempt to bridge the concerns of the Mexican and expat sides of the community. Rather ironically, however, DAI decided to hold two separate meetings: one for the Mexicans, another for the expats, which only served to uphold the already existing social divisions. The yearly celebration of Cabo Pulmo, which takes place in June, is another case in point. When I attended the event in 2009, it was dominated by the Mexican residents—there were only a handful of expats in the whole crowd. The celebration was clearly by and for one part of the community. Yet another example of this social division: community meetings. Over the course of my fieldwork I attended several community meetings, which were unfailingly attended, time and again, by the same small number of very active *female* members of the Castro and Cañedo families. The expats were rarely to be seen. The main reason why the expats don't go to the community meetings? Language. The majority simply does not speak or understand Spanish, so when they go to meetings they feel lost. On the other side of the equation, most members of the Mexican community do not speak English, so they can't translate. A definite impasse—one among many.

These divisions have implications for the future of sustainable development. Even the formation of the DAI-assisted development plan ran into problems.<sup>34</sup> When I attended the big DAI meetings (one for each side of the community), the issue of community representation was front and center. The whole point of the meeting was to unveil the

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<sup>34</sup> Beginning in June 2010, representatives of DAI Mexico, along with ACCP, Red Sustainable Tourism, Niparajá, and members of the community of Cabo Pulmo worked on developing a “strategic development plan,” which was finally unveiled in May 2012.

new development plan, but during the unveiling many attendees clearly had very little knowledge of the plan itself...despite the fact that the project had been ongoing for a considerable amount of time. It was clear that the “community” in this case was a handful of people who were willing to take the time to participate. This issue came up in both of the meetings, revealing factions and divisions on all sides of the community. Participation, in fact, was one of the primary problems with the whole DAI project, as one member of ACCP explained. Various members of the NGOs and organizations expressed similar concerns to me, namely that simply *getting people to take part in community-based projects* is often incredibly difficult. Many people aren’t interested, don’t stay with the project, or don’t have time. The contradictory, conflicted, and often unbalanced inclusion of some members within the community, and the subsequent exclusion of others, only exacerbates these micro-divisions and tensions. In short, how can a “community” come up with a long-term development plan when it can’t even agree upon who is part of the community in the first place?

### **Rallying around sustainability**

In early November 2012 I attended a four day meeting hosted by the newly created Sustainable Pueblos Project (SPP)<sup>35</sup>. The group was composed of a diverse collection of development experts, activists, planners, community members, NGO representatives, scientists, economists, architects, and others who had a vested interest in the development future of the East Cape. The primary goal of the SPP was to create, through a collaborative process, a new plan for the Punta Arena/El Rincon property, which was the proposed site for the cancelled mega-development project Cabo Cortés. As the project progressed through a series of meetings that took place throughout 2012 and 2013, the concept of sustainability became one of the key focal points for SPP’s final project proposal, which was completed by the end of 2013.

Sustainability was not one of the dominant concepts that drove the group from the get go, however. The term itself did not appear as part of the formal name of the project until the third meeting. The project was initially given a name based loosely upon the idea of “alternative development.” There was debate, especially among some of the core

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<sup>35</sup> Not the real name of this project.

architects and planners, about using the term “sustainable development” versus using the newer concept of “regenerative” development. The contrast, as explained in a presentation by one of the leading architects, is between trying to maintain a place (i.e. sustain or conserve) versus trying to create a form of development that effectively leads to the renewal of place. The core idea of regenerative design, he explained, is the shift from objects to systems, or from mechanistic models to a “living systems mindset.” His idea, in effect, was to promote a development strategy that moved away from static models toward a plan that attempted to actually shape the environment in a “positive” way.

He talked about finding a model for growth that did not destroy Cabo Pulmo. He spoke of *co-creation* between human and natural systems. He wanted people to think in terms of community, rather than “projects.” “How can tourism be something more than just an exploitative economy?” he asked. The idea of regenerative design and development, he explained, is a “new lens” for development, one that envisions profit as only one of many crucial considerations. Those other considerations include human capital, natural capital, etc—all of these should be equally taken into account, he argued. At the end of the presentation, the architect asked “How productive is it to keep talking about all these plans and projects if the civil society has not been fertilized?”

The presentation seemed to move the audience. There was a round of strong applause and commentary after the presentation. The concept of “regenerative development” dominated the first couple of meetings and shaped the overall mission of the project. This was, in part, because sustainable development was initially seen as not going far enough. Regenerative design was more about working with nature to improve place rather than just trying to sustain or maintain a place a la sustainable development. Over time, however, it began to lose out to the more well-known concept of sustainability. It was not clear why the concept of sustainability won out, but discussions about regenerative design slowly disappeared from dominant discussions. The group shift toward embracing sustainability as a foundational concept became apparent during a meeting that took place in the community of Cabo Pulmo

The meeting started just before sunset at the *Casa del Tamarindo*, which is the headquarters of ACCP. There were about twenty people present from alternative

development groups, and approximately eight community members from Cabo Pulmo. Most of them were associated with ACCP. A large circle of white plastic chairs was arranged under the tamarind tree. Kids were running around playing, laughing, as the sun slowly set. The mosquitoes were out. People intermittently slapped at them in a never-ending, small war. Michael, the main organizer of the project, introduced himself and the overall idea behind SPP's mission: to create an alternative to Cabo Cortés.

Judith Castro was the next speaker. She said she was glad to see all of the people and experts who are taking time to work on this project. But, she said, we really need to listen to people from Cabo Pulmo.

After she spoke, she indicated that she wanted Don Pedro,<sup>36</sup> one of the primary elders of the community, to speak next. But he declined, instead urging his son to speak instead. Pedrito was a little hesitant, but then said: "I have ideas, but I want to hear the ideas from these experts." He continued, saying he wants to see development at Punta Arena/Cabo Cortés as "natural as possible." Michael stepped up and encouraged Pedrito to share more of his ideas. Pedrito then added, "I would want something smaller, cabanas, sustainable, ecological." Again, he said, he would like to hear about more examples and possibilities.

One of the SPP members who works with the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), an international NGO, talked briefly about a few examples, ideas for alternative development projects. Michael asks if he can come back and share these ideas, with photos, another time. The CREST representative says sure, he can do that.

Another SPP member speaks up. An economist from Mexico. He says the most important thing is that the beauty of the place is for everyone—it should be accessible. So that all people—Canadian, American, Japanese, local—can access and preserve Cabo Pulmo. Keep it open, he says, that's the most important part.

Finally, Don Pedro speaks up. He says he thinks that everyone is going to "focus on the same channel" and that "everyone wants sustainable development." Cabo Pulmo will get developed, he says. There were many years of fighting for the conservation of the park—it was terrible to see how much destruction there was [on the reef]. "It's necessary to create something more organized," he said, "to create something that protects places

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<sup>36</sup> This is a pseudonym.



that are heavily visited. We are all focused on the same problem and mission ... it's important to remain firm about the kind of development that's coming in." Gracias a ustedes [thank you to you all], he says as he finishes. Everyone applauds and Don Pedro sits back down.

Panchito,<sup>37</sup> a younger fisherman and dive guide from Cabo Pulmo speaks next: "We all want the same: sustainable development."

Angeles speaks next. She says she wants to see developments without golf courses and marinas. "I want to see a small resort that focuses on nature, cabanas, focuses on the ocean and sun."

Panchito speaks again: "We need to get the government involved. We need to be a good example for the rest of Mexico. Don't make massive hotels. We need to be a model for the rest, for the other states of Mexico."

Michael speaks again. We don't have a lot of time to do this, he says, making it known that he thinks this group has to act quickly to achieve success. "But we have some time to organize, and everything depends on your ideas and our ideas." He invites all of the people of Cabo Pulmo [those present at the time] to be a part of the project in the coming months.

A local historian from San Jose del Cabo asks: "What do all of you want here in Cabo Pulmo?"

Judith responds by talking about the community development plan that was created with the help of DAI. We want water, light, and schools, she says. She refers to the main DAI objectives. Judith adds, "We have to think outside Cabo Pulmo, include [surrounding communities such as] Santiago, Miraflores. We have to focus on the different qualities and strengths to create something *en vez de Los Cabos* [in place of Los Cabos]. We need to connect all these communities—it's a dream, but realities start with a dream."

### **Sustainable dreams**

The community meeting at Cabo Pulmo highlighted—overwhelmingly—that the concept of sustainable development held powerful social meanings. In contrast to the

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<sup>37</sup> Pseudonym.

concept of "regenerative design" introduced by the outside expert, sustainable development was (and continues to be) a highly charged term that serves as a rallying point, a starting point, and a political bridge for social action. The reason for this, I think, is that sustainability was already a well-known concept that was being used by local NGOs, community groups, activists, environmentalists, and others. Clearly, the DAI/ACCP plan had undeniable impacts upon members of Cabo Pulmo who took part in the project. The community development plan, which places sustainable development at the heart of its mission, reverberated outward and ended up influencing other, related efforts—including the project that eventually came to be known as the Sustainable Pueblos Project.

During the SPP meeting, the members of Cabo Pulmo who spoke up not only expressed their support for the idea of sustainable development, they also explained, in their own ways, what that means for them. They spoke in terms of basic infrastructure, schools, ecological developments, and nature. They talked about keeping development small-scale, and working with surrounding communities. Implicit in their responses was the idea of participation. They spoke of a kind of development in which they—the community—have a voice in shaping their own future.

It is important to remember that the “community” of Cabo Pulmo as represented at the SPP meeting is one subset of a larger, often fractured whole. The ACCP-Castro faction is undeniably one of the most active and dominant voices in the community, and they often take it upon themselves to speak for Cabo Pulmo as a whole. This is a strategic, political act—and it’s not without contestation. There are other factions in Cabo Pulmo, including many members of the expat community, who are unwilling to listen to or endorse the efforts of ACCP or its members. This discord comes from deep, divided social histories. Those histories reach back to conflicts about land—and rights—that continue to shape and infect how people in Cabo Pulmo enact *community*.

The concept of sustainability resonates beyond the discussions of local residents. The management plan for the national park talks about sustainability. An entire edited volume dedicated to Cabo Pulmo focuses on the possibilities of sustainable development (Gómez 2008). It is a pillar of the DAI community development plan. The Mexican government has officially adopted the rhetoric of sustainable development. It is

everywhere. And yet, despite all of the official definitions and technical uses of the term, its meaning shifts around to serve a variety of purposes and politics. It's a container of ideas, motives, beliefs, and values that's just open, enough to allow for people to feel they are participating in positive social change.

Sustainability can be seen as a controlling, manipulative exercise of power that's implemented (ironically) in the name of conservation (Goldman 2004). It can be little more than the "commoditized and decontextualized terms" that inform much of the official discourse of politicians and policymakers. It can be an empty term, or result in destructive practices. Watts and Peet write about sustainable development as one "strategy" that's meant to alleviate the constant "political and economic tensions between growth and environmental degradation" (2004:xiv). Sustainable development can be one of two things. It can be a pacifier—as in a way of framing economic growth in terms that people find acceptable and tolerable. This would be sustainable development as a means to permit the continuation of patterns of growth. This version, Watts and Peet argue, makes development palatable, just enough, so that people don't revolt. The Mexican government's adoption of the rhetoric of sustainable development serves as such a pacifier. But sustainable development can also translate to a strident defense of both environment and place through more radical politics and political action. In sum, it can mean anything from "acceptable" degradation to "zero environmental damage" (Watts and Peet 2004:xvi). It can be about consumption and growth, or, about social reproduction (i.e. the satisfaction of basic human needs), history, cultural values, and long-standing place-based meanings and practices (see Escobar 2008:9). The residents at the meeting used sustainable development as a term to encapsulate their hopes for participatory change.

On the East Cape, and in Cabo Pulmo more specifically, the concept of sustainable development seems to mean something other than what official definitions spell out in formal documents. It appears to mean that people feel there is an alternative to the development machine that sometimes appears unstoppable. It means that there are other ways of doing things—that Los Cabos is not the only possible future. Sustainable development works as a sort of point of agreement, a linguistic and social meeting ground in which people come together and decide they can work together to create

*something else*. It works as a powerful bridge between the dominant Mexican families, more recent immigrants, expats, and outside interlocutors. There is a sort of vague, hopeful optimism attached to the idea. The vagueness, however, is part of what allows for greater alliance building and participation. The optimism comes from the openness of the concept itself—the fact that it can mean various things at once (e.g. rational management of natural resources and local agency and participation). But it's a delicate optimism.

Gómez is right to point out the potential of Cabo Pulmo, but also to question whether or not its development future will truly have anything to do with the ideals attached to sustainability. The question is a big one, and it's not just about the conservation and maintenance of the surrounding environment, but also the social environment. Sustainability, as expressed by many residents of Cabo Pulmo, is about local demands, desires, hopes, expectations, and self-determination. A sustainable community is one in which people are still able to live in the coming years—one that they are able to access freely and participate in. It would be a place where people have a secure connection to the land, in which they have access to fundamental resources such as water and the ability to meet basic human needs. It would be a place, ultimately, where the reproduction of *community* takes precedence over the production of tourism destinations and revenue. Will Cabo Pulmo become a sustainable place? Will it avoid the foibles and devastations of Los Cabos, Cancún—and Los Angeles for that matter? Sustainability is a hopeful dream in Cabo Pulmo, one that rests precariously on a conflicted past, a fractured community, and contested rights to a place that has witnessed more than 20,000 years of human drama.

## **Chapter 5: The making and un-making of community**

*To put up a fence is to suggest difference where there is none (though there will be),  
and to draw a border is much the same thing.*

-Rebecca Solnit

### **Narratives**

From the outside, Cabo Pulmo looks idyllic, tranquil, and peacefully beautiful. The small Mexican village located right alongside the world famous coral reef. The blue waters of the Sea of Cortés. Wide open beaches. No traffic, high rises, or crowded urban streets. A national park that serves as a model for the rest of the world. Cabo Pulmo appears to be paradise (See Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1: Cabo Pulmo Bay, 2005.

Cabo Pulmo is one of Mexico's prized ecotourism destinations (see Gámez et al. 2008) and conservation success stories (see Aburto et al. 2011). Yet, in recent years, Cabo Pulmo has gained national and international attention not only for its conservation efforts, but also its widely publicized fight against the encroachment of massive development projects (see Greenpeace 2011; Cabo Pulmo Vivo).

Cabo Pulmo's story—as told and retold by members of the community, the media, and a slew of national and international NGOs—is both compelling and

deceptively simple. It works. It sells. It gets attention. The story of the small community of fishermen that changed its ways and chose conservation instead of exploitation draws in tourists and garners the sympathies of environmentalists, politicians, and policymakers alike. It creates an image of a community that found a way to work together, overcome challenges, and preserve an endangered place.

The website of Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP), a community-based NGO, has a good example of one dominant narrative that's being told about Cabo Pulmo today:

Our grandfathers were pearl divers who taught their sons the art of fishing. We grew up in this place and learned from our parents who to make our living from the ocean. For many years, we fished for sharks, large fish, and turtles. Great mounds of shells accumulated in this place, because eating turtle was also a part of our culture [ACCP N.d.].

As time passed, fishing became more difficult. The ocean wasn't giving as much fish as years past, and each time we had to go further out. At the same time, more and more people were coming from outside to view this beautiful garden that was in front of our fish camp: the reef. When we dove in the ocean, we realized how much damage we were doing to the corals by anchoring on the reef.

Our scientist friends from the University Autonoma de Baja California Sur advised us about the ecological importance of the reef, and the importance of protecting it from over-fishing. We organized and petitioned the government to create a natural protected area. Thanks to this initiative, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1995 this marine reserve was created. Ten years later UNESCO recognized it as a World Heritage Site, and in 2008 it was named a RAMSAR wetland of international importance.

The ACCP site describes Cabo Pulmo as “a small community committed to the care of this corner of the planet. Our vision is that Cabo Pulmo become [sic] a Sanctuary of Ocean, Land and People, a truly ecological, rustic and authentic tourist destination.”

A similar version of Cabo Pulmo's history also appears on the Cabo Pulmo Sport Center website:

Members of the Castro Family who own and manage this company are descendants of one of the founders of Cabo Pulmo, the pearl diver, Jesus Castro Fiol, born in this community in 1897. As the time went by, the inhabitants of this community realized ... the scarcity of marine fauna and decided to change [their] way of earning [a] living. They quit commercial fishing to dedicate their lives to 100% friendly and environmental businesses. Jesús Castro Fiol passed away at the age of 108 years old in 2005, right after Cabo Pulmo became a National Park to be enjoyed by the world [Cabo Pulmo Sport Center N.d.].

The Castro family, which forms the backbone of ACCP and operates several tourism-related businesses in Cabo Pulmo, including the Cabo Pulmo Sport Center, has become one of the most prominent voices in the community. The two examples above tell the story of Cabo Pulmo from the perspective of this influential family. In many senses, when it comes to representations of the community of Cabo Pulmo, it's the Castro family's voice that speaks the loudest. When it comes to media coverage, press releases, academic investigations, and other publicity, the Castros are, quite often, the go to representatives.<sup>38</sup> Their version of the history of Cabo Pulmo has been published in various online venues, articles, and books (see Cariño et al. 2008). *Their history* of Cabo Pulmo is becoming *the history* of the community.

These histories aren't just published online or printed in books. They are also part of local conversations, discourses, and presentations. I saw several versions of the performance of this history while I was doing fieldwork in 2012. The first was when the "Pacific Voyagers" sailed into the region and came out to meet with the "community" of Cabo Pulmo. As described in the previous chapter, they were met primarily by members of the Castro family and the staff of ACCP. A second performance took place about two months later, when members of the Clipperton Project visited Cabo Pulmo. This time, Judith Castro, then President of ACCP and one of the most outspoken public voices in Cabo Pulmo, stood up and told the story of Cabo Pulmo once again. She began by recounting the history of the community. She said they were just a "typical" fishing community in the past, and that the reef was "their own little garden." Next she explained that even though they depending on the reef for their survival in those days, they didn't really understand its value. Judith said that over-fishing led to degradation of the reef and its fisheries. Then she credited researchers from UABCS in La Paz for helping to explain why this was happening to the reef, and working to establish the park in 1995. She noted that the park has been in place for 17 years, and that it is a great example of successful

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<sup>38</sup> There are several reasons why this is the case. The most important, probably, is the fact that the Castros are linked to media outlets, NGOs, and academics through their community-based NGO (ACCP). These social networks result in a continual communicative feedback, in which earlier connections to media, academics, etc lead to further connections, interactions, and conversations. The second most prominent voice in the community is probably the subdelegado, but that position's reach is far more limited to local politics and issues.

conservation in Mexico. She concluded, pointing out that while the community of Cabo Pulmo used to survive through fishing, now they focus on ecotourism

Together, these representations paint a picture of a unified, valiant, ecologically-minded coastal community that welcomes visitors and vigilantly protects the surrounding environment. These narratives serve powerful purposes. They help tell an important story about the possibilities and potential of local participation in conservation efforts. These narratives also create an attractive story that draws a diverse range of tourists to the community. But they serve another purpose as well: they also help to legitimize the Castro family's claim to Cabo Pulmo.

There are other histories, other stories about the community of Cabo Pulmo. The Castro family's version of events reveals only part of the story. It's not that the Castro narratives are necessarily wrong; they are partial. What is left out is just as important as what's included. Most notably, the Castro narratives about the community rarely mention the *other two* Mexican families who played important roles in making Cabo Pulmo what it is today. And they certainly don't mention the expats.

Here's the reason why: Cabo Pulmo may be a beautiful place,, but it's also deeply contested ground. Tourists who pass through for a short time may or may not see past the idealized stories and media representations. But if they look closely, they'll see cracks in the façade. The fences, which cut all through the landscape, should be the first clue (see Figure 5.2). As James explained, there were even cases in which certain pieces of property were fenced in twice because of land disputes. One person would put up a fence to claim a piece of land, and another would come in and put another fence around that fence as a counterclaim.

Hoss has been living in Cabo Pulmo since 1998. He started traveling down to Mexico and Baja California ten years before, finally finding his way to Cabo Pulmo. He was first drawn to Cabo Pulmo, like many other expats, because of a love for windsurfing. He said he feels fortunate to have had the chance to buy land and live on the East Cape. Early on he had dreams of living a simple life down on the East Cape, of being the "extranjero" living among local Mexican people. He often speaks about the importance of community, of engaging with other people around him; it's something that he loves about his life in Cabo Pulmo. He talks with a glowing sense of honor about his



nickname, “Kilometro,” (a reference to his tall stature) that his Mexican neighbors gave him. It makes him feel connected, part of the community. It means a lot to him to know and interact with his neighbors—that was why he came down to live in Baja in the first place. But, he says, many of the expats don’t have any Mexican neighbors and they aren’t interested in interacting with them. Hoss also talks openly about the tensions between expats and the Castro family. He says there’s a lot of underlying anger and mistrust. Many of the older expats who have been there for a long time hold animosity toward the Castros. Like many others, he talks about the good days when the expats all camped down on the beach.

Once that was fenced off by the primary family here [referring to the Castro family], and they said “Oh no no no, this is ours,” people who got caught in that situation, hold this in their mouth every day. They won’t go to a restaurant in town that’s owned by that family [the Castros]—nothing. And they live this real shallow existence here, I think. They might enjoy their hobbies, their sports—but they are not engaged in the bicultural community; they’re totally separated.

Maribel remembers when those fences went up as well. When the expats arrived, and the land wars started, she says, the fences went up. When she was growing up in Cabo Pulmo fences were a rare sight. Today, she runs the Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, which is one of the main destinations for visiting tourists. “Cabo Pulmo is a paradise for the people who come from outside,” she tells me, “but for us?” Her lingering question casts doubt upon those idyllic stories about Cabo Pulmo’s past. For her, she explains, Cabo Pulmo isn’t really a community. Why? “Because of all the baggage from the past,” she says. She’s referring to a longstanding feud over land that has torn through the community for more than three decades. Far from being a paradisiacal community where nature and humanity coexist in peaceful harmony, Cabo Pulmo is a place in which nature is the subject of bitter social battles over boundaries, rights, access, and, ultimately, control. Land ownership is the central problem in Cabo Pulmo. But the ongoing battles over land also reveal a continuing struggle over the meaning of community as well.

### **Community**

Community is about identity. It’s about belonging. It’s a social and rhetorical tool that defines the edges of “us” and “them.” It is an ongoing set of relationships, linked with local, shared meanings, that tells us who is an accepted part of the social order—and

who isn't. Community formation is not just about harmonious, close-knit social relations; while community can be about inclusion, it's also often about exclusion:

A sense of community, therefore, has both positive and negative attributes. While it provides a feeling of stability and comfort for 'insiders,' in an extreme form it reinforces perceptions that those who are not in the community are 'outsiders' or marginal, and unworthy of being (Low 2003: 65).

Communities often arise, or become more actively engaged, because of outside threats, whether real or perceived (Taylor 2010:242). In this sense, communities can be formed in opposition to other groups of people or social processes. Community is as much about conflict as cohesion. This is the darker side of the often romanticized concept (Joseph 2002). Weber viewed community formation in terms of competition; his argument was that community is created through competition for economic, political, or social resources. Solidarity, for Weber, was born out of conflict with others.



Figure 5.2: Fence and guard tower near Cabo Pulmo, 2009.

The concept of community has many idealistic strains that continue to the present day. Many view community in a romantic light, as unified, homogenous, like-minded social wholes. But the concept is also laden with contradictions (Taylor 2010:242). The policing of internal norms and boundaries can lead to oppression within and exclusion of those outside (Taylor 2010:242). Gated communities in the United States and Latin

America are a good example of exclusion in the name of cohesion (see Low 2003; Caldeira 2000; Taylor 2010:242).

Both Perin (1977) and Greenhouse et al. (1994:3) talk about the need to put people, things, and behaviors “in their place.” This gives local space a deep moral meaning. The desire to put people, things, and behaviors in their “right” place is often based upon normative values, beliefs, and morals. In the case studies examined by Greenhouse et al.,

When people talk about ORDER, they invite their interlocutors to visualize their towns’ former “way of life” ... Thus, the distinction between people who are where they belong and people who are out of place is highly charged. [This distinction] evokes the image of rival moral orders sharing the same space, as if the local landscape itself were contested ground (Greenhouse et al. 1994:3-4).

The “myth of community” (see Low 2003; Greenhouse et al. 1994:11) creates a symbolically rich, “protected space” in which people supposedly coexist with others who share similar social, economic, political, and ideological values. The outsider, as the individual or group that is out of place, plays an important cultural and ideological role by defining the edges of community. Outsiders have no moral claim to contested ground. They are intrusions upon the accepted moral and social order. In Cabo Pulmo, the expats are the outsiders. They are “out of place.”

The community of Cabo Pulmo isn’t exactly the uniform, homogenous, tightly-knit little place that the myths have popularized. In fact, it’s a collection of three Mexican families that coalesced around the 1970s, coupled with a hodgepodge of American, Canadian, and other foreign residents who began arriving around the same time. While two of the Mexican families have ties that extend back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the actual community—as a collection of residents with a sense of shared identity and connection to place—is a more recent creation. This helps to explain why the current battles over land ownership are so problematic: nobody has a deep, primordial claim to Cabo Pulmo. The only people who had unquestioned, deep ties to the place were the Pericú, who exploited and lived alongside the coral reef for thousands of years before Europeans ever arrived (Fujita 2006). But the Pericú, by most accounts, were almost completely wiped out during the Spanish Missionary period (see Crosby 1994).

Everyone else in Cabo Pulmo is more or less a recent migrant. Today, the Mexican residents of Cabo Pulmo who have the deepest ties trace their ancestry back to

individuals who first arrived on the peninsula in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. That connection seems strong enough, but problems arose during the ensuing 20<sup>th</sup> century when the land was gifted, gambled, sold, and resold, usually without proper documentation, to various people. This created a land tenure situation that was, by the 1970s, incredibly confused and complex (see Weiant 2005). When the expats began to arrive in the late 1960s and early 1970s—and started buying property—the situation eroded even further.

The current symbolic and social battles over community—who belongs and who doesn't—have to be understood in the context of these histories. Many of the conflicts and tensions between the Mexican and expat residents stem from a double-sided insecurity about land ownership. The current situation, however, doesn't tell the whole story of Cabo Pulmo. Before the community fractured over land disputes, there was a brief period in which the relations between the expats and the Mexicans weren't so frigid. Those were the days before the fences. Before land values went through the roof. When Cabo Pulmo was just a small, hot, dusty, out of the way place where an eclectic collection of people resided alongside a 20,000 year old reef.

### **Before**

Pel and Peg Carter found their way to Cabo Pulmo back in 1966. They made the rough two hour drive from the Punta Colorada Hotel before finally reaching Pulmo Bay. The Carters were told to seek out a man named “Manuel” who lived there. They found him, and praised both his hospitality and generosity in their book *Trails and Tails of Baja*. The Carters were taken with both Manuel and his family. This man was Manuel Cañedo, son of Francisco “Don Chico” Cañedo, one of the two men who have the deepest claims to Cabo Pulmo. The Carters' book documents the period of time just before various families came together to form the incipient community of Cabo Pulmo.

Before the 1970s, Cabo Pulmo was never much more than a seasonal fishing camp that was used by a few families, including the Castros and the Cañedos. James, an expat who first arrived in 1969, said there was “nothing there” when he first visited, “just the Castro Fiol family, a few shacks, and about 18-25 people.”

Maribel describes a very similar picture of Cabo Pulmo during that time: There was “absolutely nothing” there when she was growing up (she was born in 1971). Her

family had a fishing camp in Pulmo, but they all lived in La Paz. Everyone lived in *casitas de madera* (literally “little wooden houses”) on the beach, she explains. The Castros camped, fished, and went to La Paz to sell their products. They also went out to the Pacific often as well, to take advantage of lobster season. Theirs was a self-sufficient, seasonal life.

When Maribel asked her mother which family arrived in Cabo Pulmo first, she unhesitatingly said that it was Don Chico Cañedo and his family. According to Maribel’s mother, “By the time I arrived in 1970, there was Manuel Cañedo’s house, Don Chico’s house, and this one [Maribel’s father’s house].” This meshes with what Franco Cañedo, son of Manuel and grandson of Don Chico, told me: his father arrived at Pulmo in 1959.

Two families, therefore, formed the basis of the Mexican community of Cabo Pulmo: the Castros and the Cañedos.<sup>39</sup> A third, the Minjares family, soon joined them. The expats also began to arrive in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of them, like Dick Barrymore, flew down in small private planes. Others made the long drive down the coast, which was a journey made easier by the completion of the trans-peninsular highway in 1973.

In the late 1970s, more and more expats began to arrive. Many of them were friends with Dick Barrymore. Seven rented property on the coast and built small, simple *palapas* (a few of these are still standing today). As word got out about the fishing, diving, and windsurfing possibilities at Cabo Pulmo—not to mention its beauty—more expats came. They started camping on the beach, on the south side of Cabo Pulmo point. This seasonal migration became a ritual. People would come year after year to camp, dive, fish, and socialize together.

This was a time when the relations between the expats and the Mexicans were reasonably good, according to several Mexicans and expats I interviewed. Friendships existed across the supposedly impossible barriers of culture and language. Eddie, a long-time Mexican resident of Cabo Pulmo, attests to the more harmonious past of Cabo Pulmo. His father Tito opened the first restaurant in Cabo Pulmo. He says he misses those times: “Back then, there wasn’t much here. Just my father’s restaurant. Not much,

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<sup>39</sup> The Castro and Cañedo families are connected to one of the original landowners of the area, Meri Montañón, who ran a cattle and pearl fishing operation in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The patriarchs of the Castro and Cañedo families both allegedly worked for Montañón. #

no fences. People could still camp on the beach. Life was very different. I miss all the campers ... I was good friends with all of them. I liked the life of those days.”

Mickey<sup>40</sup> was one of the original expats who started coming down to Cabo Pulmo. He was there in the days when the community of campers was in its peak. He remembers how it all began for him:

We came here when the highway came down to Baja. It was the first year they opened it up and we came down here in a Dodge van that was turquoise that had hot pink dingle balls. And I parked right at the stone house ... We stayed at that spot and we weren't into windsurfing we were just into fishing and we went out on a little rubber raft ... and caught about a ten pound pompano. And back then we could go diving [on the reef]. We got lobsters and you know—went out diving and just got fish off the reef. And we just camped for a couple weeks and then turned around and left ... After that we came back down. I'm going to guess that's like 25 years ago [around the mid-1980s]. We came back down and we'd camp on the beach and we'd go windsurfing. That's when windsurfing first started ... and we'd camp right on the reef where Palapa's trailer is right now ... We'd camp between there and the little arroyo ... I had a three-quarter ton pickup truck with a cab-over-camper, queen sized bed, hot water heater—all the bells and whistles—and I'd pull into that spot and we'd put a shade cloth across the whole arroyo ... and have bonfires at night and go fishing on the reef and get dorado, tuna. And [then we would] take a big windsurfing board and turn it upside down and make packets of dorado and we'd just feed the masses. Everyone was camped on the beach; we'd come down every day and we'd do potluck. So people would bring whatever they'd bring: 'ya we've got two dorado' and we'd filet them up and it was like 'ok party down at the beach' and...a lot of alcohol was consumed and there was loud music...

Mickey's narrative paints a carefree time of sociality and fun. Many of the residents do talk about those times as the *good old days*, the times when the place was literally flourishing with people, and when the land was open for free camping. Mickey's story is mostly about the expats, but others talk about relations between the expats and Pulmo's Mexican residents. Mary, one of the long-time expat residents, first visited Cabo Pulmo in 1982:

The first trip we got in a Subaru station wagon with two kids and a windsurfer on top and underneath the seats packed with diapers for [our two kids, who were one and four at the time]. This was in 1982. And we didn't even have room for chairs so we brought a blanket and two pup tents—and we tied the shade tarp in between ... to make a little nest for [our youngest child] when he needed a nap in the daytime. But we fell in love with coming here and so the next year we had a big

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<sup>40</sup> This is a pseudonym..

tent and a little tent, and little pickup truck—and then the next year we had, we probably went a few years with the tents and then we got a little popup camper, and then we got a [laughs] bigger truck, and then we got a nineteen foot travel trailer, we were really styling, but then Bud became a fisherman so much so that he needed to haul a boat, so we could no longer haul the trailer, so we went back to the tents. And then we got a camper that went on top of our truck, and so every year we came all through the kids' school but we had decided the optimum amount of time for the kids to miss school was six weeks. So Bud would drive down and he'd spend two or three months and then we would fly in and he'd have camp all set up. And we'd do our schoolwork on the beach ... There was nobody here [in those days]. I'll bet there was maybe ten families—Tito's family, Eddie's father, they had 16 kids. And they were all here, in Tito's, living there with their families. So like Eddie's oldest brother's name is Tito Jr., and his wife Arceli and their little girl [...], who was like one or two years younger than our daughter, Laura. So our kids went to Tito's every day to play with those kids. And Andy had the bike with the high rise handle bars [and] Eddie's youngest little brother ... used to ride Andy around on his bike all day long because [the boy] was so happy to have a bike, he just had to cart this kid around with him ... And so [Tito's was] the only restaurant in town. It was slow—that first year there was only us and three other campers, and they were all windsurfers ... And then the little Mexican village, which was not that many people—the extended Castro family, Tito's family, and the Cañedos ... The next year we came down there's like 30 campers on the beach and like 30-40 [people] on the water. Every single day. Windsurfers. And we were like “whoa explosion!” It was all these guys from Idaho. [Mickey] and his partners had a windsurfing place on a lake in Idaho and I guess they dammed the river or whatever, dried up their lakes, so they went out of business. So these guys were all camped out there. [Mickey] was selling windsurf masts, [another early expat resident] was camping in this great big RV he had and he had a little sign that said “Workshopin is Open” and he could repair your boards—you know Heinrich,<sup>41</sup> Mr. Ingenious German. And this other guy Chuck who was about 70 at the time ... He had a welder and a sewing machine and—I mean you could get anything done right on the beach there. And it was really crazy how many people were camping.

Mary's narrative reveals some of the connections between the expats and Mexicans during those times. Many of the expats came down with their kids, who ended up growing up with their Mexican counterparts. Elisa Cañedo, at 29, was very young back when all the expats were camping on the beach. In 2012 she was the *subdelegado* of Cabo Pulmo, the main political representative for the community. When we talked about the relationships between the expats and the Mexicans, she answered,

Yes, we live mostly separate today, but back when there were fewer of us they [the Americans/expats] were more sociable, more supportive. I remember that

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<sup>41</sup> This is a pseudonym.

when my siblings and I were little, many American families came with a lot of things for us. They were the ones who brought us tennis shoes, clothes, toys—the few that came in those days were friends of the family. My parents knew many Americans, many who don't come anymore, who have died and all that. But, yes, I remember that we waited with Nancy when the month came that they would all start showing up. I remember they would drink coffee at my house, they ate, my mother would make them tortillas—they were very close to the family ... I was very young, so I don't have many memories of them, but I vaguely remember the campers ... If I look through my memories I can see the windsurfers on the ocean, but I don't remember much about where they were staying ... I was very young but I remember they were riding waves right here out front. I remember one time Memo [her brother] tried it, because he was very good friends with them since they were all the same age—and Titos' kids, they were friends with Barrymore's children too. My brother tried [windsurfing], and so did Don Tito's kids.

Elisa recounts stories about relationships, gifts, and people regularly spending time in her home. Her memories illustrate some of the close, intimate connections that existed—for a time—between at least some of the Mexicans and some of the expats. She also tells us, as Mary did, how the children of both the Mexicans and the expats grew up and played together.

Maribel, introduced earlier, was about 10 years old when the expats started arriving in the early 1980s. She is part of the Castro family, but not the dominant faction. Her father was always the “black sheep” of the family because he did things differently than the rest of them. As a member of the Castro family who married into the Barrymore family, she has a view of the histories of Cabo Pulmo that moves beyond some of the more polemic viewpoints. She recounts Dick Barrymore's arrival in Cabo Pulmo:

When Barrymore arrived, there was an airstrip and he landed there. This was a while back. When he came here he loved the place and he wanted a piece of property. But this was—I know this now, in this time. I didn't know then. When he came here, when he fell in love with the place, he came with his girlfriend. And then he came back with his children. He said the Castro family was super nice to him. They invited him to dinner and there was a lot of conviviality. He brought an inflatable zodiac in his airplane and they all went fishing, brought in fish, the whole family ate and they got along really well.

For a brief time in the 1970s and early 1980s the expats and Mexicans did manage to get along. Some of them even became friends. There's an argument to be made that a certain sense of community started to build this time—one that actually extended beyond the boundaries of citizenship. Without romanticizing the era, we can identify it as a time when Cabo Pulmo was a place where expats and Mexicans were able to coexist, all



drawn, for their varying reasons, to the blue ocean and its seemingly endless bounty of fish. But this loose sense of *comunitas* didn't last long. Soon, the fences came up.

### **Roots of the land wars**

Meri Montaña died long ago, as did her brother Federico, whose name appears on an 1897 document that lists him as the owner of the lands that now encompass Cabo Pulmo. Jesus Castro Fiol, who was born in 1897, has passed away as well, along with Don Chico Cañedo. Dick Barrymore is also gone. These are some of the people who directly shaped the history of Cabo Pulmo. But the details of many of their lives—and transactions—have been lost to time, memory, and politics. Now we're left with the stories of the people who remain. Maribel's life history weaves through the stories of the two families who have been fighting for so long. She's a Castro, the daughter of one of Jesus Castro's sons. But she married into the Barrymore family. She tells the story of the land deal that divided her community:

[Dick Barrymore] started to investigate the properties here. Because he wanted to buy. So [Jesus Castro] was selling, wanted to sell land to Barrymore. And Barrymore said "Ok, I want to buy from you but I want security. He wanted to know Ok, what is your land, do you have documents, do you have this, do you have that? Jesus Castro Fiol said "No no no, I'll just sign it. I'll sign a document that says you bought it from me." And Barrymore said "No no no." He left and hired a lawyer from La Paz to investigate the properties and who had the clearest land title. And it was the Gonzales Canseco family. They were the ones who owned this property and that property ... It was a hacienda, separate from that of Meri Montaña. So I don't know if Meri sold to them, I don't know. It was the cleanest title in the area. So he [Dick Barrymore] didn't have the money to buy everything ... this was in 1973 or 1974 I imagine. So he invited nine of his friends—partners. They did it through a Mexican corporation in Tijuana. They invested and the company bought it [the land]. So that's how Barrymore became the owner ... So when he came back to Cabo Pulmo and he had not purchased [the land] from the Castro family, and he hadn't bought from anyone else, just the Canseco family ... They [the Canseco family] lived in San Jose [del Cabo] and Mexico City. They weren't here. They are a family—to this day the Canseco family is very powerful and they were very good friends with the President of the Republic—the general Abelardo Rodriquez—and they had property at Los Frailes and everything. But I imagine that, in those years, when you're the boss, you have more [power] to be a landowner, no? So that's how the history of the Barrymores began here. They bought from the Gonzales Canseco family. So when he [Dick Barrymore] came here and he hadn't bought from the Castros or anyone else [living in Cabo Pulmo], the fighting began. That's when they started putting up

the fences. I didn't understand why this was happening at the time. For me it was my house, my land because this is where I grew up ... and a gringo comes up and stops you or something—you get angry, no? And them too [the Castro family] ... So when Barrymore bought all of the land, that was when he started having problems with the Castro family, because they argued that the land was theirs, not Gonzales Canseco, and [Barrymore] bought the lands illegally because Gonzales Canseco didn't have any documents or any of that.

This issue is perhaps the most complicated, complex, and confused aspect of Cabo Pulmo's history. Because of this, there are multiple competing histories that explain what happened to the land and who is supposedly the rightful owner. One version is that Jesus Castro Fiol lost the title to his lands because of gambling. In this version, Castro used his land to pay gambling debts. In this case it may be possible that this is how Castro Fiol's land ended up in the hands of the Gonzales Canseco family. At least one member of the family was known to accept land to pay off debts (see Weiant 2005:158). A similar story is that Castro Fiol sold the land multiple times to multiple people using more than one set of papers. Another story is that a person named Max Gotting allegedly lived in Cabo Pulmo before the Castro family became prominent. Gotting was of German descent and lived in Mexico City. Apparently Jesus Castro Fiol had legal issues and Gotting offered to help him out with a loan. Supposedly Castro Fiol gave Gotting his title document as collateral. Some members of the Castro family claim that Gotting tricked Jesus Castro out of his lands (Tinoco 2008). Others paint a more generous picture of Gotting's motives, saying that he only kept the title documents because Castro never paid him back for the loan.

Either way, the story is that Gotting left and took the title documents with him. This particular version helps explain some of the land invasions that took place years later, between 2006 and 2009, when the family of former Mexican president Jose Lopez Portillo tried to claim lands in the area. Gotting supposedly had ties to Lopez Portillo family—some say he was married to the president's daughter. During the 2007-2008 land battles, signs were posted all along the East Cape road from La Ribera south to Cabo Pulmo. Some of these signs claimed possession of the land through Max Gotting's documents, which supposedly date to 1964. During subsequent court battles, the Lopez Portillo/Gotting claims were not upheld, in part because he never paid taxes or actually occupied the land.

Curiously, the Lopez Portillo family did not attempt to make any claims for the land that Dick Barrymore purchased in the 1970s. The prevailing story among the expats is that Barrymore “did his homework” and his title documents were clear and secure. Maribel’s version is that Barrymore purchased the land from the “Gonzales Canseco” family. According to two interviews by Weiant (2005:161), however, Barrymore purchased the land from an individual named “Carlos Manuel Gonzales Cesena.” That name also came up as the person who sold the land to Barrymore during one of my interviews with a long time resident. It is possible that references to “Gonzales Canseco” and “Gonzales Cesena” could be pointing to the same person. It is certainly possible that some of the names are getting mixed due to the limits of memory and personal recall. During the same interview I mention above, Carlos Manuel Gonzales Cesena was described as the nephew of a person named “Meri Cesena,” who, he said, was one of the founders of Cabo Pulmo. This person supposedly raised both Jesus Castro Fiol and Francisco “Chico” Cañedo. It soon became apparent that “Meri Cesena” was another reference to “Meri Montaña.”

Once again, this appears to be a case in which some of the names of people are getting conflated in historical memory. One of the important points of this interview is that when the Lopez Portillo family tried to claim land in the Cabo Pulmo area, they looked into Barrymore’s lands but ultimately respected his ownership rights. Apparently the person who sold the land to Barrymore (whether Gonzales Canseco or Gonzales Cesena) may have been friends or at least associated with Max Gotting, who in turn was connected to the Lopez Portillo family. According to Maribel, the Gonzales Canseco family was very politically connected, as was, obviously, the family of a former president. Despite the often confused and sometimes contradictory nature of some of these histories, I think this does clearly show the level of politics that was at play during all of this. It is possible that the Barrymore claim was respected, in part, because of political connections that existed between the powerful family that sold the property and the other powerful family that attempted to co-opt it.

It is difficult to tell, from the interviews, informal conversations, and rumors, what is true and what is not. I made several attempts to learn more about the actual documented histories and land titles during and after fieldwork. One realtor suggested I

visit the Catastro, or public land registry office in San Jose del Cabo. So I did. I walked in with my business card in hand, hoping to get access to the title documents. After waiting in the lobby for a while and explaining what I was trying to do to several people, and I could tell that it was not going to be easy to get the information I was after. The staff in the Catastro kept asking me what it was I wanted to know, and I repeatedly asked what they had in their offices. We went around and around and I wasn't getting anywhere. I was finally ushered into an office where a firm but polite man told me that what I was doing was extremely political. He suggested I come back with a letter of introduction that explicitly stated what I was doing and why. I thanked him and walked out of the office, empty handed.

After that I decided I would try another route. This was during my fieldwork in 2012. At the suggestion of the same realtor mentioned above, I contacted a local surveyor to see if he would be able to get the information for me. I explained who I was and what I was doing: trying to write a history of Cabo Pulmo. He said it was no problem. We agreed upon a price of 300 USD for his services. Just when I thought everything was set, I never heard back from him again. I wasn't sure how to explain what had happened, but I was once again dead in the water.

I made one last attempt to get this information in early 2013, after I had already completed the main part of my fieldwork. I arranged for some funds to travel back down to Los Cabos to meet with another local contact who also had experience working in the land registry office. Once again, we agreed upon a price. I bought my ticket, flew down to the tip of the peninsula...and I never heard another thing from this person as well. I emailed him several times, but there was nothing. Like the other contact, he simply disappeared.

As a sort of last ditch effort, I did contact one local NGO who had undertaken a study of the land tenure histories, but they were also unwilling to share the information as well. I struck out on all counts. It is difficult to know what, exactly, all of this means. It could be that both of these individuals simply weren't interested in doing the work. It could be that something more political or corrupt was in the works. Or, for that matter, it might be reasonable to assume that I was perceived as a meddling foreigner who was

perhaps sticking his nose where it did not belong. Regardless, I was never able to clear up the issue of land ownership, at least in terms of the local archives.

The lack of clarity in land title leads to various accusations and rumors that circulate throughout the community of Cabo Pulmo. Some expats say that the Castro family is squatting on land that isn't theirs. Some Mexicans say that all of the "gringos" are sitting on Mexican land, and that one day they will take it all back. Sometimes things get pretty heated—but not as much today as they did several years ago. There are clearly multiple sides to the story. Some expats accuse the Castros of being 'squatters' with the intention of undermining their connection to the place itself. From a US-based perspective, squatters do not have legitimate rights or claims. What these expats do not know—or acknowledge—is that property law in Mexico designates specific, quite powerful, rights to squatters.<sup>42</sup> The dispute between the Castros and the Barrymores comes down to a matter of whether or not the person who sold the land to Dick Barrymore had the right to sell that land. One important factor is that the Gonzales Canseco family, mentioned above by Maribel, was clearly an absentee landowner—at the time of the sale they were not living in Cabo Pulmo. What this means is that even if the Gonzales Canseco family had legal title rights, the fact that they were not living on the land itself—as the Castros purportedly were—sets up a situation that is far more complicated than a simple issue of whether or not the land was sold with proper title. If the Castros—or any other family—was living there, they had (and have) rights to the land.

Over the years, these fights over land led to fragmentation between the various families and sub-groups of people in Cabo Pulmo. The community remains divided over this issue to this day. The land dispute was the beginning of a longstanding rift between the Barrymores and the Castros, which created wider tensions between the expats and the Mexicans. But this fight did not extend to all of the Mexicans—it was a fight specifically between two families and those associated with them. Many of the expats who ended up buying land from Barrymore ended up in his "camp," some by default.

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<sup>42</sup> In brief, since the Mexican Revolution, property law in Mexico has granted rights to squatters. This is a response to the inequalities in land tenure that plagued the country leading up to the Revolution. The rights for squatters reflect a prejudice in Mexican property law against absentee landlords. In order to claim rights to property, tenants have to prove that they have lived in a place peacefully for a given period of years.

The expat community kept growing, but, as Elisa explains above, the relations between them and the Mexicans became more tenuous. Connections withered over time. The two sides of the community separated themselves in numerous ways. Many of the people who used to camp on the beach eventually bought property and built houses, extending Barrymore's original development. The expats effectively built a separate little enclave, while many of the Mexicans remained in "their" side of town. Very few people crossed the boundaries between the two sides of the community; Mexicans generally only went into the expat side of town when they were there to work.

Social relationships and networks among the expats remained strong, and they became more and more insular. However, the land battles tore through the ties and relationships that had once existed between the two sides. Over time Cabo Pulmo, like many other Baja communities that have both expat and Mexican residents (see Topmiller et al. 2011), effectively became *two communities*. One for expats, another for Mexicans. This is the case not just in larger settlements such as La Paz and Cabo San Lucas, but also in much smaller communities.<sup>43</sup>). In Cabo Pulmo, the divisions between the two sides of the community were well entrenched by the 1990s.

It was also around this time that the Castro family made a fateful switch that not only changed their livelihoods, but also gave them a renewed sense of purpose and identity. In the early 1980s, it became clear that human exploitation of Pulmo reef had severely depleted its resources. Many of the Castros tell the story of this realization. I saw similar versions of this story appear in various forms of media; it also came up during my interviews. The crux of the story is that the health of the reef was in danger and something had to change. There are various accounts about how it all came about (see Weiant 2005; Cariño et al. 2008), but widespread concerns about protecting the reef resulted in the creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA), and eventually the Cabo Pulmo National Park (CPNP). The park, which was dedicated in 1995, became the basis for a renewed sense of direction, purpose, and identity for many residents of Cabo Pulmo.

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<sup>43</sup> Mulege is a good example of the development of these social divisions in small, mixed communities.

### **Community through conservation**

Some versions of Cabo Pulmo's history characterize the transition to a National Park as a smooth process, as if it was something that was meant to be. As if everyone in Cabo Pulmo suddenly changed their way of life and supported the new park. This was not the case at all. Many residents—expats and Mexicans—initially resisted the park, in part because they felt it was being imposed by outside forces. Some residents didn't support the creation of a system that would effectively restrict access and use of local marine resources. The park was supposed to be created with local input, but, as Weiant (2005:129) explains, that more than likely did not happen. Many residents actually complained about a serious lack of community involvement (Weiant 2005:123). Some participated. Many did not.

The Castro family was one of the groups who took an active role in establishing the park. As Weiant explains, the Castros were heavily involved in the park's nomination process. They worked to help make the conservation of Cabo Pulmo a priority for the Mexican government. Members of the Castro family “hosted government officials and academic researchers, shared local knowledge on marine resources, and acted as tour guides of the reef area” (2005:129-130). Few others beyond the Castro family were consulted or have any memory of taking part in the creation of CPNP (Weiant 2005:131). When members of the Castro tell this story, they focus on their desire to “change their ways” and protect the natural environment of Cabo Pulmo. But I think they were also motivated by economic concerns, fears about losing access to this place, and, ultimately, the possibility of displacement.

The Patronato Cabo del Este, A.C. was founded in 1985 by US residents from Cabo Pulmo and Las Barracas, along with two local business owners (Weiant 2005:130). This group also claims partial credit for helping to establish the park. Its main concern was protecting the reef through the creation of a functioning park (Weiant 2005:130). After the park was established, the Patronato Cabo del Este helped the underfunded park and the honorary director. It also organized community meetings, helped police the park, raised funds, and tried to create park management strategies for the fledgling park (Weiant 2005:130-131).

Patronato Cabo del Este eventually ran into problems. Non-members felt that the group was too closely aligned with the government, did not adequately address community interests, and “demanded preferential treatment” (Weiant 2005:131). Non-members also charged that the Patronato had been able to influence the design of the park so that it would better serve their economic needs (Weiant 2005:131). When the international NGO The Nature Conservancy (TNC) expressed an interest in working in Cabo Pulmo, it had reservations about partnering up with the Patronato Cabo del Este because of its primarily non-Mexican membership. In response, many of the non-Mexican members resigned and were replaced by local, Mexican residents. The Patronato was renamed in 1997 as the “Patronato Cabo Pulmo Los Frailes Grupo Ecologico, A.C.” (Weiant 2005:135). TNC was only willing to work with organizations that had solid local support, however. Due to all of the land ownership issues and disagreements about the management of the park, TNC felt that getting involved in Cabo Pulmo was too risky. The newly reformed Patronato eventually went dormant.

In Mexico, the *Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT) is the organization that regulates protected areas. According to Mexican legislation, all new protected areas must have a Management Plan in place (Weiant 2005:113). Patronato Cabo Pulmo Los Frailes Grupo Ecologico was formed, in part, as a response SEMARNAT’s call for an advisory board that could support the planning process and creation of a Management Plan. SEMARNAT also facilitated the appointment of Pepe Murrieta, a resident of Cabo Pulmo, as the park’s “honorary director” (Weiant 2005:114). Both of these actions made it appear that SEMARNAT was not going to allow CPNP to become another “paper park” that only existed by decree.

Despite those early positive signs, government support for the park was extremely limited during the first several years. There was little funding or infrastructure for actually policing the new rules and boundaries of the park, and it took years to draft and finally approve a Management Plan. Cabo Pulmo may have been “red-flagged” as a problem because of its contentious local history, further delaying the planning process (Weiant 2005:122). Murrieta, the park’s first director, was a polarizing figure. His tenure as director was fraught with conflicts. He was forced to resign in 1997-1998 because of community opposition (Weiant 2005:116). As Weiant (2005:116) explains, with almost



no funding, no director, and still no Management Plan, CPNP was effectively little more than a paper park.

Early on, the burden of supporting and protecting the park fell upon the residents of Cabo Pulmo. The Castros and Patronato Cabo del Este tried to rise to the challenge. By about 1998, the participation of these groups had withered away. One more community organization, “Patronato Parque Marino Cabo Pulmo,” was formed in 1999. According to Weiant (2005:133), this new group “contributed greatly to CPNP” through fundraising, creating park signs, publishing a park brochure, supporting park staff, and organizing environmental education programs. This group also raised funds for the now defunct community kindergarten, which was built on Cabo Pulmo point. They generated support through donations, t-shirt sales, and other “in-kind” assistance (Weiant 2005:134). But this group also fell prey to infighting and non-member distrust.

Between around 2000 and 2003, there was a period of local disengagement and disillusion about the park. Weiant calls this the “hiatus” period. As she explains, by this time most of the residents of Cabo Pulmo felt “rejected and disrespected” when it came to the park. It was, for many, just another empty promise. The park had no plan, little funding, no director, *and* very limited community support.

Up until this point, the involvement of national and international NGOs was limited to the brief interest of TNC. But in 2003 several NGOs, including TNC, Pro Peninsula, Niparaja, and Wild Coast came into the picture. This resurgence also coincided with the formation of a new community organization that same year: Amigos para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo (ACCP).

According to Ana, ACCP was originally meant to be a bridge between the expat and Mexican sides of the community. “There was a need to create a community-based organization,” she explains. “There had been several already. They came together and fell apart because of infighting.” Ana attributes the failures of the earlier organizations to the “classic small town” politics that broke them apart. ACCP was supposed to be an international organization. The charter was signed by a diverse array of people, including Mexicans and expats. The initial goal was to make everyone feel like they were part of the organization.

Unlike many of the other community-based organizations, ACCP has managed to survive the socially contentious nature of Cabo Pulmo. But it has also suffered from the infighting and local politics that Ana talks about. The “Achilles heel” of the organization, she explains, was the “insular attitude” many people have in the community. “It’s not just about Mexicans versus Americans,” she says, but about “My family versus your family. It’s all about ego.”

The woman who helped found ACCP was not a Mexican citizen. She was a young environmental scientist from Canada who came down to live in Cabo Pulmo, and eventually worked with key members of the Castro family to build ACCP. She became the first official Director of the organization. She helped build the organization and create some of its key conservation and education programs. But she also faced a lot of difficulties—because of a language barrier and because people were often suspicious of outsider’s motives. She worked primarily with the Castro family, which quickly came to dominate the organization.

While ACCP has been a successful organization, it has also been exclusive. The first director left in early 2005 after a falling out with the Castro family. Her replacement, a young, Mexican woman from outside the community, also left after running into problems. The third Director, another young woman, soon came into the organization—she continues to work there now. Judith Castro became the President of the organization around this time, and emerged as one of the primary voices that would represent Cabo Pulmo in local, national, and international media.

Within the community, ACCP became more and more the domain of one family. While the expats were initially supportive of the park and the push toward conservation, by the early 2000s many of them had taken on a much more passive, if not apathetic role. By the time I started my fieldwork in late 2011, the majority of ACCP was composed of members of the Castro family. “The problem,” says Ana, “is that they [the Castros] are keeping it all in the family.” The move to embrace had more than one motivation. This tendency to keep in it the family may have been an attempt to maintain some form of control and influence in a place that was rapidly changing—and becoming a part of Mexico’s national patrimony. As more and more “experts” came in from the outside, the Castro family made a concerted effort to establish their rights and claims to this place,

using the park itself as an important political leverage. The inclusivity of ACCP may have helped solidify their claims to Cabo Pulmo.

Today, ACCP works with organizations such as Wild Coast, The Nature Conservancy, Niparaja, Wild Coast, Development Alternatives International, Greenpeace, and RED Sustainable Tourism. The current Director heads up the organization along with a small staff, primarily composed of young Mexican women who came to ACCP from these other, outside organizations. Ironically, while the residents of Cabo Pulmo remained internally fractured because of the land disputes—and infighting about the new park—it became more and more connected with an *international community* of scientists, conservationists, activists, and scholars who came together around the idea of saving Pulmo reef.

### **Contrasting narratives**

The story the Castro family and ACCP tells about Cabo Pulmo and its National Park is a story about unity. It's a story about change. It's also a story about community. But it's also about politics, control, and rights. The narrative about the small community of fishermen who decided to embrace conservation may be an example of the sort of "strategic essentialism" that Spivak writes about. "It is within the framework of a strategic interest in the self-alienating displacing of and by a consciousness of collectivity, then," she writes, "that self-determination and an unalienated self-consciousness can be broached" (1988:14). By telling the story of Cabo Pulmo—a story that is understood internationally as a fight for nature and conservation—on their terms, the Castros risk alienating others, whether this means the other Mexican families or the expats. But the risk of alienating others comes with the strategic, political goal of eventual self-determination and legitimation, in this case through a wider recognition of the Castros' rights to a place via recognition of their conservation efforts. The story is idealized, simplified, and powerful. Over the past several years, ACCP has used this story to bolster its fight for conservation and against the kind of mass tourism development in places like Cancún and Los Cabos. The story has been effective. But can it keep working?

Today, the beach where all the expats used to camp is mostly empty. The whole area is surrounded by barbed wire fences. People can still rent a place to camp, but few actually do. There's a sign on the property that proclaims the land as the property of the Castro-Montaña family. Two of the last holdouts finally left in 2011. They had camped there for the previous decade (and more), but finally decided to move on. If you walk through the area today, you can still see various remnants of the expat camps. Bricks that served as patios. Water containers. Beach cobbles used for walkways and planters. The land itself remains locked in an ongoing court battle between various people who claim ownership. It's a symbol of the cracks in Cabo Pulmo's social foundations.

When the residents of Cabo Pulmo became embroiled in a widely publicized fight against Cabo Cortés between 2008 and 2012, there was a resurgence of hope in the idea of community—and solidarity—in Cabo Pulmo. The fight against Cabo Cortés involved numerous national and international organizations, media campaigns, and extensive attention for the “community” itself. ACCP and the Castro family became the face of the community throughout this fight.

Many residents spoke of the threat of Cabo Cortés as something that brought people together and created a renewed sense of community. During my fieldwork, I heard this mostly from the expat residents. While Cabo Cortés was a subject that the Mexican residents talked about, they weren't as concerned with how it affected the relations between themselves and the expats. The Mexican residents were more focused on saving their home and way of life from large-scale development. The *expats* were also worried about saving Cabo Pulmo, but they were also very attached to the idea that the campaign against Cabo Cortés could bring the community together. There was hope that the outside threat would be enough to push people to find a way to work together. One of the issues here is that the Mexican conception of community often does not include the expats. This became apparent during many community meetings and events in which the expats and Mexicans remained rigidly separated. Often, there were social events that were specifically for either Mexicans or expats—events that included both were extremely rare. For the expats, the idea of community does tend to include the Mexicans, even if this is not actually played out in daily practice.

Andrea, whose history is shared in Chapter 2, has lived in Cabo Pulmo for about ten years. She and her husband Rich were initially drawn to the area because of its natural beauty. But they were also attracted by what they felt was a strong, cohesive community of Mexicans and expats. It was only after they moved to Cabo Pulmo and became more involved in local social life that they found out about all of the social problems and conflicts:

It happens everywhere, but...so I think that was something we weren't aware of, we weren't aware of some of the...problems that there were between the community here and the guy who we bought the land from...we had no idea that existed. So that...really was kind of disillusioning and really unfortunate, but you know again, a lot of it's understandable and some of it just to do with the specific personalities on both sides ... So in that way I think we had a little idyllic view when we started out "oh neat everybody gets along this is so cool," but it wasn't really the case at all. And even within...the more we learned that even within the community you have friction between the local people who are indigenous to the area and the foreigners, you have friction between the foreigners and the foreigners, each other, and you have friction between the local people amongst themselves even within families, so it's the human thing, you know, you're just seeing a microcosm of the world, right here in Cabo Pulmo.

When I asked Andrea what issues are most divisive in Cabo Pulmo, she quickly answered “Property. Property. Property with a capital letter.” Then she added, “It’s what wars are made of.”

But for Andrea, like many of the other expat residents, the fight against Cabo Cortés started to break down some of the old conflicts:

I think Cabo Cortés really changed radically what's happening in this community because the community dropped, buried a lot of the old issues in order to come together to fight this thing. So that's a big...to me that was a really great, really kind of a blessing in disguise--as warped as it sounds, I mean it's hardly a good thing but it really did do that.

Mickey, who has lived in Cabo Pulmo for about two decades, has similar feelings. He has lived through many of the social conflicts that pulled the Mexican and gringo residents apart. Now, he says, things are different: “What’s cool about today is we have a sense of community. There’s a whole lot less division. It’s more about Cabo Pulmo versus Cabo Cortés.”

Marissa agrees. She has owned a house in Cabo Pulmo for about 12 years. Before Cabo Cortés, she explains, “Nobody cared about bridging the community. People would not go to anything [community meetings, etc.]. The old guard would not go to anything.

They just coexisted.” Big development, she says, was the catalyst for social change: “We realized we would all lose. You can’t untangle the story without Cabo Cortés.”

Sally, first mentioned in Chapter 2, explained that she feels Cabo Pulmo is changing for the better—and it’s a direct result of Cabo Cortés. “Cabo Cortés has done more to unify the community of Cabo Pulmo than anything else,” she told me. There have been other efforts and attempts to bring the community together, she told me, but it was the outside threat of Cabo Pulmo that forced this change to take place. Among the expats themselves, it was this common cause that pushed them to “wake up” and start taking part in community-based events and meetings, she explained. Sally told me that Cabo Cortés helped people get past some of the prejudices they have about Mexicans and be willing to work together.

While the Castro family and ACCP have popularized the “little fishing community that changed its ways” story, the expats are proposing their own, alternative narrative: “Cabo Cortés is what brought us all together”. Each of these tropes has elements of truth. They are also both effective and powerful in their own ways. Each story simplifies reality in order to talk about—and attempt to build—social solidarity that is able to bridge long-standing divisions. The ACCP/Castro story has helped build connections between local Mexican residents and a range of national and international NGOs. It’s a story that works in larger media discourses. The expat story, on the other hand, is more about building *internal solidarity* between two groups of residents who have been on separate sides of the fence for decades. Again, both of these stories are simplified, powerful, and effective.

But are they enough?

Mary tells me there’s still a lot of animosity between the expats and the Mexicans, especially the older generations. It’s different with the younger generations, she explains, but the rifts still exist between the people who have been here the longest. She says she doesn’t think the expats will ever be part of the community:

I mean, we ride through town and [people say] 'hola Maria' and I say hola back to them and know their names, but...we're not going to be sharing dinner ... So I mean they respect us, but it's never going to be--it's one of the sad things to me living here is that we'll never be part of this community.

For Mary, like many others, everything comes back to land. She mentions repeatedly how people have told her they will take back all the houses in Cabo Pulmo someday, how the land is all theirs. Mary bought land from Dick Barrymore, so she's automatically associated with his "side" of the dispute. The people telling her they want to take back the land are from the older generations of the Castro family. The dispute lives on. And it's not as if the Castros are the only ones keeping it alive.

Despite their story about how Cabo Cortés has brought the two sides of the community back together, many expats still harbor deep resentments toward their Mexican neighbors. Some repeat the rumor that the Castros and other Mexicans were actually the biggest "rapists of the reef" before they turned to conservation. This is the kind of talk that doesn't get brought up in formal interviews, but it's there. If you spend time in Cabo Pulmo, as I did, you'll hear it. It's a rumor that questions the motives of the Castros, and attempts to tear down what they have been able to build. It's a rumor that upholds divisions.

Another rumor circulates among the expats that cuts to the heart of the land issue. Some expats say that the Castros are squatters on Dick Barrymore's land. This is a rumor that's heard more in the backchannels, not something that people talk about out in the open. It's a way of saying that the Castros have no right to Cabo Pulmo, that they don't belong. It defines them outside the community, as people "out of place" who have no rights, ties, or legitimate claims. Like other stories that people tell in Cabo Pulmo, these rumors are powerful in part because they are so simplified. They cut away all context. They serve particular purposes. And they reveal how much all of the social conflict in Cabo Pulmo is really about competing claims to the same place.

### **Compromise as the law of life**

During the fight against Cabo Cortés, the Castro faction that dominates ACCP presented itself as *the community* of Cabo Pulmo in much of the media coverage. In the eyes of the global audience, Cabo Pulmo became a place in which a small, local, possibly "indigenous" group of local fishermen stood up against, and eventually defeated, a massive enemy. It was a story of a small community fighting oppressive, powerful outside forces.

While this narrative was attractive and effective, it also masked the actual histories of Cabo Pulmo itself. There are no indigenous residents *per se*. The community that does exist—to the extent that it can be called a community—is a recently forged amalgamation of three Mexican families and different groups of expat residents. Unlike the media depictions, which characterize Cabo Pulmo as a unified front, challenging Big Development, the actual community is deeply divided, fragmented, and caught up in longstanding disputes over land.

While the fight against Cabo Cortés did bring people together for a short time, it's questionable how deep or lasting those changes really were. People still stay on their sides of town. The community meetings are still attended mostly by Mexicans. The expats still have their own segregated social networks. Many residents still stay on “their” sides of town. While the campaign against Cabo Cortés may have produced a “temporary unity” (Leach et al. 1999) talk about, when it comes to community, perhaps there has to be something more than just a single cause to bring people together. It's arguable that community once flourished—at least for one bright, brief period in the 1970s. Today, the fences, private property signs, and even daily habits of both Mexicans and expats—who rarely cross certain social boundaries—speak to the eventual fracturing of this community. The divisions that exist, while they are exacerbated by things such as language and culture, actually come from a deeper source.

Much of it comes down to land, which is why so many expats say that the situation in Cabo Pulmo is akin to the old Hatfield and McCoy battle in the United States. That reference comes up again and again among the expats. Many know that something has to give. Hoss, mentioned above, talked a lot about the tensions and animosity between the expats and the Castro family in particular. In many ways, he describes conflicts that are rooted in the older generations. Despite everything, despite all of the bad blood, he holds out hope for the future:

It's bound to change. All of us are going to die ... and the younger Mexican generations will lose the animosity, I believe. I see it already. I see it. But it's not going to happen overnight. And, one positive thing is, as this globe spins through space and things that have been so precious to us—like our environment—gets [sic] degraded, and you become more aware of how much of it has been degraded, the more that people get on the side of saving what we have here, the more the barriers I just spoke of—drop away.



Moving forward will be next to impossible as long as those old divisions remain. Hoss also talks about a lot of his neighbors who have no contact with or interest in their Mexican neighbors. He explains that many people come down just to do their own thing—to windsurf, vacation, have their own solitude. They don't come down to engage with others. Still, Hoss holds onto an optimistic hope for what new attitudes—and younger generations—will be able to accomplish.

Sally and Wilkie describe a similar situation, saying that hardly any of the expats cross over and talk or interact with the Mexican side of the community. Very few people crossed that social boundary, especially in years past. However, both of them think things are changing. Their outlook is, undoubtedly, a result of their experiences in Cabo Pulmo over the years. Unlike many of the expats, Sally and Wilkie often make a concerted effort to not only be involved in their own community of expats, but also to cross over to and engage with the Mexican side of the community. During the time that I lived in Pulmo, they were two of the most active when it came to cross-cultural community interaction. This was the case despite the fact that neither of them speaks fluent Spanish, showing just how far a little determination can go. Both of them told me they were able to find ways to connect with the Mexican side of the community pretty early on. They spent time on the Castro side of town, and got to know many of their Mexican neighbors and their kids. Sally spoke fondly of the Palapa restaurant, which for her was an open, inviting place where she always felt welcomed and comfortable. She and Wilkie also spoke with optimism and hope about some of the younger generations who have grown up and now play a key role in shaping the future of Cabo Pulmo. Like Hoss, they both look to some of the younger generations with the hope that they will be able to surmount some of the divisions that have lasted for so long. When I asked Sally what she hopes will happen for the community of Cabo Pulmo in the near future, she told me that above all else she wants to see is “Harmony, cooperation, a more integrated community, and people working toward a common goal.” When I asked Wilkie the same question, he answered with one word: “Trust.”

Judith Castro is not from the “old guard,” the older Castro generations who still hold their grudges against their expat counterparts. She knows that things have to change, and she has been one of the few members of ACCP who has been willing to cross the

social lines and work with the expats. As one of the new voices of ACCP—and Cabo Pulmo—she speaks for the interests of the older generations, but also for some of the new interests and ideas of the younger Mexican residents. She is open to change. When we talked about the relationships between the expats and the Mexicans in Cabo Pulmo, and the future, she said:

We have to involve them [the *extranjeros* or expats] for the good of the community. It's difficult—but we have to involve them. The Mexicans, for their part, have to allow this to happen. And the *extranjeros* [expats] have to want to be involved. There should be an exchange of ideas. It's difficult. It's complex. But it has to happen.

But that exchange of ideas is going to require an open, honest conversation about the subject nobody wants to address: who owns the land. It's a conversation about who belongs—who has a right to this place. During my interviews, that was the one subject that stopped the recordings. Many people did not want to go on record to talk about it. It's a subject that's difficult to address because finding out the “truth” seems impossible. People avoid talking about it, but they also deal with it through rumors, gossip, and the selective telling of history. Land, the basis of community, lies at the heart of Cabo Pulmo's problems.

“All of the fighting creates problems in families,” Maribel explains. “It teaches your kids how to be egotists, how to want everything for themselves.” Maribel has lived in the middle of a battle between two families her whole life. She knows just how deep the divisions go. She knew Cabo Pulmo before it was all fenced off—and before the land itself was worth millions of dollars. Cabo Pulmo looks like paradise from the outside, but the never-ending conflicts over land have made it anything but for the people who live there. Compromise, she argues, “is the law of life.” Compromise may be the only way for the community of Cabo Pulmo to move forward, so that its residents can finally re-build the basic social trust among themselves that will be necessary if they hope to stand a chance against outside pressures that are both powerful...and relentless.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

*The crisis is a period in which a diseased social, economic, and political body or system cannot live on as before and is obliged, on pain of death, to undergo transformations that will give it a new lease on life.*

-Andre Gunder Frank, 1981.

### **Putting people first**

The controversial *megadesarrollo* Cabo Cortés was cancelled on national TV by former Mexican president Felipe Calderon on June 15, 2012. That announcement was met with a round of celebratory cheers from the people who had worked hard to fight against the project for the previous three years. The cancellation was seen as a major victory for groups such as ACCP, Cabo Pulmo Vivo, Greenpeace, Wildcoast, Niparajá, and The Nature Conservancy, among others. But this news was also met with cynical comments about how Calderon's decision to "cancel" Cabo Cortés was just a political move, since as the outgoing president he had nothing to lose.<sup>44</sup> Some locals commented that this gave Calderon an opportunity to display his environmentalist credentials before leaving the presidency. Calderon explained his reason for announcing the cancellation: the Spanish developer Hansa Urbana had failed to demonstrate "beyond a doubt" that its development would not damage the local environment (Johnson 2012). He cited concerns about "sustainability" as one of the main issues.

But Calderon didn't close the door on mass tourism development on the East Cape. He didn't even close the door on Hansa Urbana and Cabo Cortés. After his announcement, he posted another message on Twitter, which was immediately retweeted (ironically) by SEMARNAT (see Figure 6.1). Calderon's message translates to: "We will partner with the investors of Cabo Cortés to develop a new *sustainable* tourism project" (italics mine). He then noted that during his presidency more than 240 billion pesos were

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<sup>44</sup> The other issue here is that Hansa Urbana was facing serious financial difficulties by this point, which adds another layer to the story of the cancellation. While many supporters of Cabo Pulmo claimed this as a victory, others argued that the real reason why Cabo Cortés failed was the economic downturn of 2008-2009.

invested in tourism development, all of which were authorized after complying with environmental legislation,<sup>45</sup> which was more than three times the previous administration.

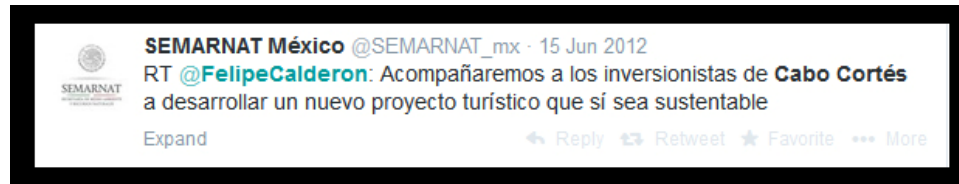


Figure 6.1: Screen shot from Twitter showing Calderon's tweet.

Less than three months after the cancellation of Cabo Cortés, the project resurfaced under the name “Los Pericues.” Switching its name from a famous explorer who failed to conquer the Baja peninsula to the native people who were all but wiped out during the Spanish colonial period, this “new” project was little more than a slightly reworked version of the old (with a few additions that attempted to make the project appear more ecologically friendly). The one thousand pages revealed project plans that were nearly identical to Cabo Cortés. One thing that had changed was the development company behind the project. Hansa Urbana was out. Instead, a company called “La Rivera Desarrollos BCS,” which was financed by the Spanish company Grupo OHL, was in (C. Herrera 2012). Los Pericues was quickly shelved, like Cabo Cortés, because of environmental issues with the development proposal.

Fast forward to March 2014. My inbox was suddenly flooded with emails about another “new” Cabo Cortés, this time under the name “Cabo Dorado” (The Gold/Golden Cape). Former Mexican President Vicente Fox helped broker a new effort that includes a company called Altavista Partners and the Chinese real estate developer Sansong Beijing International Trade Group (Wild River Review 2014). Altavista's partners include former FONATUR director John McCarthy, who was also involved with Cabo Cortés, and Gustavo Ripol, one of the former promoters for Cabo Cortés. They are working in partnership with Paul Zhang, CEO of Sanson Beijing and a possible “shell company” named “Glorious Earth LLC” (based in Irvine, CA), which has a subsidiary in Mexico under the name “La Rivera Desarrollos BCS,” the same company that backed Los Pericues. Sergio Tabansky, former spokesperson for Cabo Cortés, was the new spokesperson for Cabo Dorado. It's all the same effort, despite the name changes.

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<sup>45</sup> Note, however, that Cabo Cortés, which later turned out to be in violation of environmental regulations, was approved by SEMARNAT during Calderon's administration.

Cabo Dorado is part of a new effort between Mexico and China to improve trade and business relations. The project plans include “a 4,080 room, nine-hotel complex with an additional 6,141 houses and apartments, two golf courses, an airstrip, a center of cultural exchange, a center for research in science and technology, a sports performance center, a university campus and a center of trade and investment promotion” (Wild River Review 2014). According to the estimates of Cabo Dorado’s promoters, the total number of rooms projected to be built is approximately 18,423, about 2,000 more rooms than the total of present day Los Cabos (Cabo Dorado 2014). This estimate was published in defense of the project since allegedly “Misleading information has instilled confusion and concerns regarding the number of hotel rooms and homes to be built in Cabo Dorado” (Cabo Dorado 2014).

Like Cabo Cortés before it, Cabo Dorado has sustained severe criticism for its 3.6 billion dollar project. The statement about the number of hotel rooms was meant to reassure the public that this new “ecotourist city” (as the promoters called it) would be a positive, sustainable development project. The Cabo Dorado website explicitly states that it is a “sustainable project that will preserve the environment.” And so continues the colorful life of the concept of sustainability, which not only inspires the anti-megadevelopment supporters of Cabo Pulmo, but is also (supposedly) one of the guiding principles behind this latest version of Cabo Cortés. Ironically, Cabo Dorado’s proposal was rejected by SEMARNAT in late May 2014...due to its failure to address environmental concerns (Méndez 2014).

But the process continues. Cabo Dorado—or whatever it may be called in the future—is not dead in the water. It’s out there. There are powerful interests behind this effort to push mass tourism development into the East Cape. These efforts have been underway for years. They probably aren’t going to stop anytime soon.

In this dissertation I have explored the process of development and commoditization through the concept of value. I have argued that the expanding tourism and real estate markets—of which Cabo Cortés and Cabo Dorado are powerful examples—act as forces of “dispossession.” These encroaching markets, which result in tremendous land values and rising costs of living, slowly dispossess people of the ability to decide what truly matters in life (in other words, what “value” really means). As

landscapes are mapped, documented, priced, compared, and sold they are also alienated from locals. People are pushed out of their own homelands for a basic, simple reason: they don't have access to enough money (sometimes, as in the case of Cancún, they're also forcefully removed as well).

This process of dispossession is not inevitable. It is not the only possible social arrangement that we can hope for. There is room for people—for local communities—to fight against larger, powerful processes that transform places around the world into revenue-producing mass tourism destinations. There are alternatives to the mega-development models that influenced places like Cancún and Los Cabos. My conversations with many local residents in and around Cabo Pulmo revealed that most people are in favor of a smaller-scale form of development that accounts for people (and social needs) as much as it accounts for revenue. Cabo Pulmo may indeed be a potential model for a new kind of development...but not in its current social state.

Two important issues stand in the way of something like “sustainable development” in Cabo Pulmo. The first is the issue of land ownership. As long as land tenure remains so contested, not to mention insecure, it's going to be difficult if not impossible to create an arrangement that actually works in the long-term interests of the residents of Cabo Pulmo. The unsustainable nature of this situation is made all the worse by the fact that values are so high, and properties are so contested, that new generations can't even stay in the community. This also makes it impossible to build schools, churches, stores, health services, and other important social institutions. Why? Because there's no land where these kinds of public structures can be built. There isn't even a public meeting place or plaza in Cabo Pulmo, let alone a primary school. How *could* “community” survive?

The second issue is the question of community itself. Cabo Pulmo has a small population of Mexican residents that come from three primary families. This is the Cabo Pulmo presented on TV news and presidential announcements. But it also has about 150 foreign residents, or expats, some of whom have roots that go back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Those people have been there for a long time, and yet they continue to live a life apart from the Mexican residents. There truly are two communities in Cabo Pulmo. These communities have been kept separate by culture, economics, personal histories and

hatreds, and the kinds of daily habits that develop when people adjust to “how things are.” While Cabo Pulmo is often represented—whether by its members or outside interlocutors—as a community of “local fishermen,” it’s actually a highly diverse, and divided, international community. While there was a period of temporary unity that took place during the fight against Cabo Cortés, that unity has once again dissipated. And yet, the external threat still persists. If community sustainability is truly the goal, then it’s about time for Cabo Pulmo’s residents to find a way past some of their internal squabbles and battles. This will require concessions on all sides.

Finally, we have the issue of sustainability and the meaning of sustainable development. Sustainability is a rallying cry for many people who seek to defend Cabo Pulmo and the East Cape from the depredations (perceived and real) of mass tourism development, real estate speculation, and uncontrolled growth. The tourism city of Los Cabos is a living lab of just what can go wrong when mass tourism models are implemented. The *cordones de miseria* that surround Los Cabos are, perhaps, the most salient reminders of exactly what did go wrong. They are clear reminders of the limitations and blind spots inherent to Mexico's current planning process. A tourism city with 16,000 rooms is going to need a tremendous number of workers and support—obviously—but there’s often little attention or concern about that part of the development process. And so we have people with no water, health services, and power living alongside some of the most expensive resorts in the world. Cabo Dorado, for all of its pretensions about sustainability, is proposing an ecotourism city of 18,000 rooms, but we haven’t heard a word about what’s supposed to happen with the 150,000 or so thousand people we might expect that city to house once it’s all said and done. If history tells us anything, we can probably expect more exclusive resorts, high end restaurants, and privatized spaces surrounded, like Los Cabo and Cancún, by poor, working class residents with few material, social, or economic benefits. There is a pattern to all of this, and it’s anything but sustainable in the long-term. But it persists, often, because of sheer power and economic force.

Communities in places such as Cabo Pulmo are rising up and demanding something different from development. They are seeking alternatives. Other paths and possibilities. Many of them are speaking the language of “sustainability,” which is indeed

a powerful language. But that very same language has been hijacked and manipulated by powerful institutions and interests—from the World Bank to Cabo Dorado, backed, as it is, by former presidents and other influential partners.<sup>46</sup>

What can be done? It may be a matter of defining—or taking back—terms. Or, perhaps, it will be a case in which we see a radical redefinition of what sustainability and development can mean. Perhaps in Cabo Pulmo development won't mean the transformation (and commoditization) of places to serve the productive needs of the global market but instead will be a participatory process that ultimately puts people first.

### **Future research**

There are more than one million US citizens residing in Mexico (see MPI 2006; Croucher 2010; Schafran and Monkkonen 2011). There are approximately 27,000 US-born citizens in Argentina, 40,000 in Brazil, and 20,000 in Costa Rica (MPI 2006). The formation of expat enclaves in these and other countries throughout Latin America, recently highlighted by work in Costa Rica (Van Noorloos 2013, 2012, 2011) and Panama (Myers 2009; Thampy 2014, 2013, McWatters 2009). Information about the formation and impacts of these growing sites of “residential tourism” (see McWatters 2009) is limited, yet growing, as these trends of reverse migration—from wealthy to developing countries—continues to expand. There is growing evidence that the prevalence of these communities leads directly to dramatically rising land values. McWatters (2009:76) documented an escalation of approximately 500% in Panamanian land values in less than ten years. My own research on the East Cape revealed a similar pattern of inflated land prices.<sup>47</sup>

Rising land values are part of a larger process through which places are being transformed into commodities for sale in global land markets. Higher land values, in fact, mark a later stage in this process of re-inscription in which local meanings, uses, histories and values are slowly subsumed and marginalized during the commoditization process. Land becomes valuable only after the political, technological, and social work that goes

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<sup>46</sup> Remember that the history of Mexican tourism development has also been a history of presidential influence and involvement, from Miguel Aleman onward (see Clancy 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Saroj, mentioned earlier, talked about land values rising from approximately 2,000 USD to 200,000 USD in 5-6 years, and then rising to well over a million after that. Other residents of Cabo Pulmo purchased coastal land for 10,000 USD in the mid 1980s that is now worth at least \$500,000.



into making it appealing to external visitors and investors. Only, that is, after thorough dispossession (Elyachar 2005) or what Li (2014) refers to as the creation of “regimes of exclusion.” Maps, fences, websites, laws, real estate companies, and roads are just a few of the ways through which places are made investable and local people are dispossessed. As the US economy continues to stagnate, the future only portends more of the same as the “rich” continue seeking “cheap” land in supposedly marginal places around the world. These US migrants are coming, despite academia’s silence about the matter (Schafran and Monkkonen 2011).

The lack of academic attention to these trends is both alarming and intriguing. As Croucher (2010:6-8) explains, there are several potential factors that might explain the collective ignorance of US migration to Mexico (and Latin America in general). First, it might be easy to dismiss these patterns of migration because they remain relatively small. But as Croucher points out, despite the relatively small numbers, it is critical to note that approximately 69% of Mexico’s foreign born residents are from the United States. This statistic alone points to the potential impact of this pattern of migration. The second reason for the lack of attention to these migration patterns may stem from an assumption that US expats have a “positive” impact on their host countries. This argument, considering all of the attention to Mexican immigration to the US, is both ironic and troubling. Neither of these two are very robust explanations for the lack of critical attention to these issues.

Croucher highlights a third potential source of this gap in research and attention that is far more compelling: We don’t study US emigration to Mexico and Latin America because many US citizens, academics, and politicians do not think of “white” people as immigrants (2010:8). We don’t think of immigrants as people who leave rich countries to live in poor countries. This collective ignorance of a growing flow from powerful to less powerful countries may, in the end, come down to politics. Perhaps many US and other academics don’t want to study the economic, political, and social impacts of these migrations because they hit uncomfortably close to home. Tourists, after all, are just a few degrees of difference away from expatriates—and they can often be found in the same places. With power comes the ability to deny.

Ironically, many expats and tourists from the US travel to Mexico and other parts of Latin America on a quest to escape—for a short time—the realities, pressures, and degradations of first world development. They seek out places like the East Cape to get away from the traffic, noise, crowds, and pollution of Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and New York. They are looking to experience nature and some sort of “authentic” connection with people, places, and environments that are not completely ensnared in the logic of capitalistic growth and development. These “unknown,” far off places attract and are first visited by the more intrepid of western travelers (see Cohen 1972; Butler 1980). The paradox, which Cohen (1972:175) outlined long ago, is that these western travelers, serve as spearheads of mass tourism and commercialization of their chose places of escape, respite, and refuge. They are one of the first waves of value transformation that turn landscapes into commensurable parcels. The resulting social politics, conflicts, and dispossessions that often ensue in the name of “economic development” can no longer be ignored.

This dissertation takes a few steps in the direction of shedding light on these important, and increasingly pressing, issues of expatriate migration, development, power, value, and dispossession, through a case study of the East Cape of Baja California Sur. But more work needs to be done. First, while I was able to explore the lives of expats who live and work on the East Cape, more detailed and systematic research needs to be done on these populations.

There are several pockets of expats who live all along the East Cape; they continue to have tremendous impact upon the development of this place. But their presence has been, up to this point, treated as a relatively insignificant factor in much of the current research. Most development- or conservation-related research about this part of BCS focuses on the national park at Cabo Pulmo, threats to biodiversity, and the impending impacts of tourism development. The anthropological and sociological research that has been done in the area focuses almost exclusively on the Mexican residents, leaving the expat population—which is often larger than local Mexican communities—out of the picture. Overall, the expats present a difficult case since they wield considerable economic and cultural power while also existing in a precarious legal state. Future research needs to gain a better understanding of not only the detailed

demographics of these expat populations, but also how their values, actions, desires, and choices actually affect and shape the development of local communities throughout BCS. Ironically, many expats are adamant about avoiding any sort of politics in Mexico, even though they exert powerful informal political influence day in and day out. It is this influence that needs to be addressed.

Future research must also more fully address the question of value. Here I was able to examine value production (and contestation) in a very broad sense, but the actual mechanics of value need to be more fully addressed. This was a question that I had a difficult time even asking when I was first doing this research project: How can value be explored and measured ethnographically? What I didn't know then was that value, for my research, was mostly about the commoditization process as it relates to land. It is the process through which competing claims and uses are challenged and subsumed by global markets, speculation, and what Li (2014) and others might call a "land grab." Now that my research is done, I have a much better idea of how it might be possible to study these value transformation processes in a more direct way.

First this would require a detailed ethnographic study of the ideas, ideals, and practices of the land buyers and real estate agents who purchase, develop, package, and sell land via real estate networks, magazines, and websites. This would entail questions about the amount of money paid for land relates to asking prices in the short and long-term. On the other side of the coin, a deeper ethnographic examination of value would also require attention to the histories of use of a place, including the memories, landmarks, and practices that inscribe places with meaning and various forms of value (as sources of livelihood, beauty, or family). In order to examine how values translate to value in the singular, economic sense, it would be necessary to undertake an in-depth study of the decision-making process that goes into the choice to sell a given piece of land at a given time for a certain amount of money.

In the midst of all this, the land itself really had not changed much. As Polanyi taught us long ago, land is a difficult, odd sort of commodity. As Li (2014) land can't be treated as just another thing because you can't just "roll it up and take it away." Land stays. It pushes back against the commoditization process (Li 2014). Sure, people bought and sold land, they built some houses, and they put up a lot of fences. But the vast

majority of the land itself remained more or less the same—despite all of the talk about development, the speculation, and the “land wars.” The whole subject of my research was, in the end, a subtle process through which a place was being re-cast and re-imagined as worthy of investment—and therefore development. No wonder I had a hard time coming up with research questions.

I began by asking about the meaning of development, which led to me to the question of value. I wanted to know what role values played in the development process. Such a process is laden with power inequalities, to be sure, and ideological differences. The values that motivate and shape conceptions of development—and the implementation of or resistance to development models—range from the cold calculations of neoclassical economists to the sometimes romantic ideals of conservationists. This is how questions of value in development eventually wind their way to the idea of sustainability. Sustainability, which is about providing for the needs of an unforeseen future generation, brings us to the question of community. After all of this, I think I realize my true subject, which was there the whole time but never quite addressed in the way it should have been: land. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the global processes of tourism, development, and commoditization that continue to shape places, dispossess people, and attract billions of dollars of investment, we need to get back to the problems, potentialities, and meanings of land itself. Land is ultimately what sustains us, what forms the basis of any possibility of community. If we talk about sustainability, we’re talking about land. And so the task for future research sits before us, obvious, right under our feet.

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**Professional Experience**

2014 – Instructor, ANTH 200: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (CSUSM).  
2014 – Instructor, ANTH 302: Principles of Archaeology (SDSU).  
2011 – Instructor, ANT 160: Cultural Diversity in the Modern World (UKy).  
2010 – Teaching Assistant, ANT 225: Culture, Environment, Global Issues (UKy).  
2010 – Instructor, ANT 101: Introduction to Anthropology (UKy).  
2009 – Instructor, ANT 101: Introduction to Anthropology (UKy).  
2007 – Tutor, Office of Educational Opportunity Programs (SDSU).  
2007 – Teaching Assistant, Anthropology (SDSU).  
2007 to 2008 – Archaeological Field Technician, ASM Affiliates.  
2004 to 2007 – Archaeological Field Technician, Gallegos & Associates.  
2000 – Photographic Assistant, John Sexton Fine Art Photography.

**Presentations**

- 2012 *The politics of development on the East Cape of BCS.* Presentation at the November 2012 meeting of the Sustainable Communities Group (SCG).
- 2012 *Publishing Without Perishing: Sharing Ideas and Challenging the Closed System of Academic Anthropology.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.
- 2011 *Imagined Landscapes of Wealth and Desire: Histories of Value in Baja California Sur, Mexico.* Paper presented at the University of Kentucky Latin American Studies Graduate Student Research Symposium.
- 2011 *Paving the Way for Development? Landscapes of Wealth and Conflict on the East Cape.* Paper presented at the University of Kentucky Dimensions of Political Ecology Conference.
- 2010 *East Cape Tensions: Political histories of development, tourism, and conservation along the East Cape in Baja California Sur.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology.
- 2008 *Photographic Pasts/Photographic Futures: Retelling the Past and Constructing the Future through Photographs in Santa Maria Atzompa.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.

- 2008 *Photographing Atzompa: The Ethics and Politics of Visual Representation in Ethnography*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology.

### **Awards and Grants**

- 2012 National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant.  
2012 Dissertation Enhancement Award, University of Kentucky.  
2012 Housing Grant, Baja Coastal Institute.  
2011 Adams Award for Teaching, University of Kentucky.  
2010 Susan Abbott-Jamieson Award, University of Kentucky.  
2010 Latin American Studies Travel Grant, University of Kentucky.  
2010 O'Dear Award for Graduate Student Work in Latin America.  
2009 Sally Casanova California Pre-Doctoral Grant (summer).  
2008 Sally Casanova California Pre-Doctoral Grant.  
2008 University Grant, San Diego State University.  
2007 University Grant, San Diego State University.  
2007 Office of International Programs Travel Grant, San Diego State University.  
2006 Honors in Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz.  
2006 University Grant, University of California, Santa Cruz.  
2005 University Grant, University of California, Santa Cruz.  
2004 University Grant, University of California, Santa Cruz.

### **Publications**

- 2014 Jackson, Jason B. and Ryan Anderson. Anthropology and Open Access. *Cultural Anthropology*, Volume 29(2):236-263.  
2013 From one place to another. Photographic Essay. *Anthropology of Work Review*, Volume 34(2):91-93.